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DEATH AND BURIAL  
IN  
IRON AGE BRITAIN

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D. W. HARDING

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*To Carole  
for her patience and support*



## *Preface*

The absence of a regular and recurrent burial rite in the British Iron Age, with some chronologically limited regional exceptions, has long been acknowledged by archaeologists, who have looked to rites such as cremation and scattering of remains to explain the minimal impact of funerary practices on the archaeological record. Pit burials or the deposit of disarticulated bones in settlements have conventionally been dismissed as casual disposal or the remains of social outcasts. This re-assessment challenges the assumption that there should have been any regular form of burial in the Iron Age, arguing that the dead were more commonly integrated into settlements of the living than segregated into dedicated cemeteries. Even where cemeteries are known, other forms of disposal must still have been practised. It therefore follows that what have been regarded as exceptional practices were in fact the norm, and the apparent norm was in reality the exception, for which therefore alternative explanations are required.

As well as domestic and agricultural settlements, hillforts, too, evidently played an important role in funerary ritual, as secure community centres where excarnation and display of the dead may have made them a potent symbol of identity. From the limited inventory of cemeteries and smaller burial grounds 'focal' and 'signal' burials may tentatively be distinguished, though not necessarily as indicators of social status. Age and gender considerations are also plainly relevant, though there are few indications of special treatment on the grounds of gender. Infants and children were certainly subject to special treatment, perhaps not yet having graduated to full membership of the social order. Animal burials, whether in close association with human, or in 'special deposits', are also relevant to the ritual practices that governed disposal of the human dead. One key consequence of this review is the realization that fragmentation and dispersal of the dead is not abnormal as conventionally supposed, but a standard form of disposal in the first millennium BC in Britain, and perhaps more generally in prehistory, even when the archaeological record includes other more obvious categories of burial. The supposed victims and disarticulated remains of battle casualties from some hillforts may in some cases be better explained as evidence of deliberate desecration by hostile agencies, native or Roman, in acts of punitive and symbolic suppression of a subjugated community. Notwithstanding major innovations and 'normalization' of cemeteries in the late pre-Roman Iron Age, funerary practice and beliefs may reflect long-standing traditions from the Bronze Age that survived beyond the Roman occupation.

This book is the fifth in a series by the present writer on the British Iron Age, and together with *The Iron Age in Northern Britain* (Routledge 2004), *The Archaeology of Celtic Art* (Routledge 2007), *The Iron Age Round-house; Later Prehistoric Building in Britain and Beyond* (OUP 2009), and *Iron Age Hillforts in Britain and Beyond* (OUP 2012) represents reflections on some key issues of Iron Age archaeology, which has been the writer's professional preoccupation in the study and in the field for the past fifty-five years. A key difference between Iron Age burials and hillforts or settlements is that the latter are abundantly represented by extant monuments in the landscape, whereas funerary sites are largely invisible to surface inspection. For some periods, like the Neolithic or Bronze Age, burials, or more accurately ritual and ceremonial monuments that contain burials, are marked by conspicuous barrow mounds, but Iron Age cemeteries generally have minimal if any surviving traces. The cemeteries of eastern Yorkshire are exceptional, being visible from air photographs if not from surviving mounds, but for much of Britain the archaeologist is dependent upon chance finds to fill the depleted distribution. The long-standing bias or deficiency in the data-base of Iron Age burials for much of Britain is therefore a product of visible survival, partially rectified only in recent years by the greatly increased level of archaeologically random developer-funded fieldwork. Now given a more positive spin, developer-funded fieldwork was formerly categorized as 'rescue' or 'salvage' archaeology, because of the imminent threat of destruction under which the evidence was recorded, which still often results in damage to the vital contextual detail that current study of Iron Age burials requires. The up-side of commercial archaeology, of course, is that finds are not subject to the inbuilt bias of archaeologically determined research strategies, which can prove a blessing in disguise. At its best it can transform our knowledge and understanding of regional archaeology, as is well exemplified in the work of Oxford Archaeology in the Thames valley, where excavations were on a sufficient scale to assess the role of burials of human remains in settlements.

A more recent trend has been the emphasis upon 'community archaeology', in which the public at large are involved in fieldwork with educational and recreational objectives. Involving schools or local volunteers in archaeological fieldwork is not novel, of course, since much of the fieldwork conducted in previous generations was done through local societies or with volunteer workers. The present writer in the 1950s and 1960s used a mixed workforce including local volunteers, often from WEA (Workers' Education Association) or University Extra-Mural classes (often retired ladies and gentlemen familiarly known as 'Extra-Muriels'), but also schoolchildren and 'volunteers' from penal institutions and even from the Army. But, subject to a variety of domestic and unexpected disruptions, they were hardly a consistent workforce, and university students fulfilling their vacation fieldwork requirements proved more dependable in their attendance, owing their degree lives to the

company store. What is more disturbing is the fact that archaeology is rapidly becoming an adjunct to the tourism, recreation, and entertainment industries. When mud-larking in the Thames or key-holing for finds on the battlefield at Bannockburn are presented as archaeology, and when government ministers applaud the activities of treasure-hunters with metal detectors, we can hardly expect that archaeology will be taken seriously by other academic disciplines.

The most emphatic change in the past fifty years, of course, has been the availability of specialist expertise, in the present context especially enabling a more detailed analysis of skeletal remains for evidence of trauma and post-mortem treatment as well as diet and disease. It is not clear that standards of excavation and recording have improved to the same degree: the common use of spit-excavation will jar with anyone trained in the Wheeler–Kenyon stratigraphic method. And the volume of data recovered now considerably exceeds any realistic prospect of full publication. Despite the use of microfiche (now obsolete without a library) it was still not possible to reconstruct key assemblages from Danebury, any more than it was Wheeler’s from Maiden Castle, and more recent published reports, lavishly produced with multi-colour illustration, and with copious technical reports, often lack similar important basic details. But it is in the sphere of interpretation that current fashion most fundamentally departs from older approaches. Concerns quite rightly now focus much more upon funerary beliefs and rituals, but we should guard against allowing the ‘empathic’ approach to prehistory to take us beyond the limits of archaeological inference. Concepts such as ‘personhood’ and ‘dividuality’ may initially offend as products of contemporary jargon, but equally, as Christopher Hawkes once famously pronounced, ‘we should not make the mistake of assuming that these people were rational as ourselves!’ The focus of this book nevertheless remains the archaeology of funerary practice in Iron Age Britain, and, important though they may be, ethical and other issues are not part of the remit.

I would like to record my thanks to colleagues, from discussions with whom and from whose advice I have benefited, and to those who have permitted use of illustrations. Finally I should thank the staff of North Berwick Library for their help in the reproduction of illustrations.

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Gullane, East Lothian

*Autumn 2014*



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## *Abbreviations*

<i>AFEAF</i>	Association Française pour l'Étude de l'Âge du Fer
<i>Ant.J</i>	<i>Antiquaries Journal</i>
<i>Arch.J</i>	<i>Archaeological Journal</i>
<i>BA</i>	<i>British Archaeology</i>
<i>BAR</i>	British Archaeological Reports
<i>CA</i>	<i>Current Archaeology</i>
<i>CAJ</i>	<i>Cambridge Archaeological Journal</i>
<i>CBA</i>	Council for British Archaeology
<i>CNRS</i>	Centre National de la Recherche Scientifique
<i>CorA</i>	<i>Cornish Archaeology</i>
<i>DBG</i>	Caesar, G. J. <i>de Bello Gallico</i>
<i>DES</i>	<i>Discovery and Excavation in Scotland</i>
<i>EdinArch</i>	Edinburgh University Department of Archaeology
<i>EJA</i>	<i>European Journal of Archaeology</i>
<i>HFC</i>	<i>Proceedings of the Hampshire Field Club and Archaeological Society</i>
<i>JAS</i>	<i>Journal of Archaeological Science</i>
<i>OJA</i>	<i>Oxford Journal of Archaeology</i>
<i>OUCA</i>	Oxford University Committee for Archaeology
<i>PBUSS</i>	<i>Proceedings of the Bristol University Speleological Society</i>
<i>PCAS</i>	<i>Proceedings of the Cambridge Antiquarian Society</i>
<i>PDNHAS</i>	<i>Proceedings of the Dorset Natural History and Archaeological Society</i>
<i>PPS</i>	<i>Proceedings of the Prehistoric Society</i>
<i>PRIA</i>	<i>Proceedings of the Royal Irish Academy</i>
<i>PSAS</i>	<i>Proceedings of the Society of Antiquaries of Scotland</i>
<i>SAIR</i>	Scottish Archaeology Internet Reports
<i>SAL</i>	Society of Antiquaries of London
<i>SAR</i>	<i>Scottish Archaeological Review</i>
<i>TBGAS</i>	<i>Transactions of the Bristol and Gloucestershire Archaeological Society</i>
<i>WAM</i>	<i>Wiltshire Archaeology and Natural History Magazine</i> (now <i>Wiltshire Studies</i> )



## Defining issues

*But at my back I always hear  
Time's winged chariot hurrying near*

Andrew Marvell (1621–78),  
'To His Coy Mistress'

The universality of human mortality is the commonest of truisms, but the prospect of mortality evidently has weighed differently on different societies over the course of human history, from the oppressive burden of the later Middle Ages to the more relaxed live-for-the-present-ism of the current generation. The disposal of the dead is at basis a hygienic necessity that is recognized in all but the most socially disrupted circumstances, but the manner of disposal may reveal attitudes of society towards death and the concept of afterlife, or the role of the dead in the continuing life of the community. Even in our contemporary secular society, relatives of the victims of murder or abduction or of death in foreign parts crave the recovery of bodies for due burial, without which they apparently cannot 'achieve closure', a condition of grace that might have been considered essential to the dead, but which evidently matters equally to the bereaved.

The discipline of archaeology is methodologically disposed to distort the reality of the past in that it seeks to recognize ordered patterns where in reality diversity and apparent irrationality must have been inherent. The keystone of Childe's approach, the identification of archaeological cultures, was dependent upon *recurrence* of diagnostic types *in association*, which would permit the comparison of one cultural assemblage with another in time or space. Even in processual and post-processual approaches the essence is to reduce the ever-burgeoning data-base to some semblance of order, without which it is impossible for interpretation to proceed, other than intuitively, empathically, or experientially, that is, based upon imaginative reconstruction rather than being inferred, however inadequately, from archaeological data. The consequence of this process of classification has been to emphasize certain outstanding classes of data, like long barrows, stone circles, or hillforts, as typical of their period or region, at the expense of a subtler analysis of the many

possible variations of settlement or burial sites that are detectable, even from the surviving archaeological record.

In recent years there has been a significant shift in archaeological approaches to burial data. For a generation or more consideration has focused upon identity, social status and hierarchies, and questions relating to demography; now less tangible aspects such as funerary rituals and 'personhood', including gender issues, are increasingly attracting attention (Danielsson et al., 2009: 9–11). All are valid subjects of study, providing that we recognize the limitations of inference of the data, and do not transgress the boundaries of rigorous scholarship into the seductive realms of creative fiction. Regrettably, the primary data for Iron Age burial in Britain is too often flawed, if not as a result of inept recovery and inadequate recording in the past, then as an inevitable consequence of the mechanical stripping of sites in the process of more recent development.

## THE ELUSIVE DEAD

The apparent absence of a regular and recurrent burial rite or class of funerary monument for the British Iron Age, with the principal exceptions of two regionally and chronologically restricted areas, namely, eastern Yorkshire in the middle pre-Roman Iron Age and south-eastern England in the later, has been long established (Whimster, 1977a, 1981), and was cited by Hodson (1964: 105) as a 'negative type fossil' of his insular Woodbury culture. Wilson (1981) extended the corpus by including miscellaneous burials and fragmentary remains from settlements, but these were essentially seen as a minority or aberrant population (Wait, 1985).

In fact, the decline of an archaeologically visible mode of burial begins with the end of cremation in flat cemeteries at the outset of the Late Bronze Age. As Brück (1995: 245) put it, after the Middle Bronze Age in Britain, 'a landscape structured around henges and barrows was replaced by one dominated by settlements and field systems'. Perhaps even more significant is the rise to prominence of hillforts, just as funerary practices seem to fade from the archaeological radar. The scale of enclosure of hillforts implies a need for protection, not just in a military sense but more probably as communal centres for safe storage of produce and resources, and as a focus for communal activities, including mortuary rituals that needed to be safe from intrusion or violation. And there are other major changes in the archaeological record in the Late Bronze Age, with a much broader range of bronze types with techniques such as complex casting, sheet-bronze work, and wire-drawing, leading to the development of a variety of weapons and defensive armour, developments that have justifiably been characterized as an industrial

revolution (Harding, 1994). The question of climatic deterioration is one that has been raised periodically as a possible catalyst for major change, increasing land pressures and making communities more conscious of the need to establish boundaries and to assert traditional territorial rights. In such changing circumstances it is perhaps hardly surprising that funerary customs were equally subject to change, and that burials were used to reinforce traditional territorial entitlement, in effect, that 'the dead became strong symbols of such concepts as liminality, continuity, identity, and renewal' (Brück, 1995: 264).

The apparent paucity of evidence for burials in the British Late Bronze Age and Iron Age for significant areas certainly cannot be explained on grounds of depopulation, since there is abundant evidence of settlement coincident spatially and chronologically with the absence of burials. The deficiency therefore must lie in the archaeological record or in our ability to interpret it. Even if a rite was practised that left no tangible burial record, such as cremation and scattering, the remains of pyres or ancillary structures should still be recognizable. Burial is simply the final act of deposition in what could have been a complex sequence of funerary rituals that nevertheless might leave minimal archaeological trace, so that a change from deposition to scattering as that final act need not signify nearly as radical a shift in practice as the archaeological record might suggest. But we still need to explain why such a change might have been implemented. In a politically volatile environment, especially if the population in consequence was transient or mobile, then it is possible that burial practices might reflect the lack of a permanent homeland. But there is no evidence for such instability in the insular Iron Age, and settlement evidence in fact suggests quite the contrary, with many sites displaying a structural palimpsest that testifies to renewal with little fundamental change over several generations.

Other explanations might account in part for the lack of surviving evidence. Some burials might simply have been placed on the ground surface instead of in a grave-pit, with just a low mound, sufficient to deter predators, being scraped up over them. In such circumstances, ploughing would have removed all trace of the burial, with any associated artefacts being broken and scattered beyond recognition of their former significance. This explanation has been advanced to explain the absence of surviving burials or burial pits within some of the square-ditch barrows of the Yorkshire series. Other possibilities include disposal in the sea or in rivers, though the former will evidently not satisfy land-locked communities, and limited evidence for deposits in rivers like the Thames (Allen and Hacking, 2000) suggests special circumstances rather than regular disposal.

It is hard to believe that failure to locate Iron Age cemeteries has resulted from a significant bias in archaeological research strategies, since this would surely have been rectified by the fact that the great majority of evidence nowadays derives from archaeologically arbitrary discovery during development.



The only circumstances in which this might not apply would be if burials were located somewhere that archaeological research seldom investigated but where they were not normally vulnerable to development. That very limited combination of circumstances might apply to the immediately external environs of hillforts, close enough to a protected monument to evade discovery through development but outside the normal range of hillfort excavation strategies. The known existence of small cemeteries at Broxmouth, East Lothian, Battlesbury Camp, Wiltshire, and of course adjacent to the east entrance at Maiden Castle, Dorset, underlines this possibility.

A significant factor in our failure to recognize Iron Age burials, especially on multi-period settlements, may be the absence of grave-goods, since it is these that initially trigger the archaeologist's attribution to period. So, for example, the Yarnton cemetery (Hey et al., 2011) was wrongly assigned until radiocarbon dates were obtained. Another possibility, where grave-goods are absent, is that burials were incorporated into earlier cemeteries and thereby confused in terms of dating with the generality of earlier graves. How widespread the practice was of re-using earlier cemeteries is unclear. In the case of the High Knowes, Alnham, Northumberland, burial (Jobey and Tait, 1966), located within what was interpreted as a Bronze Age cairnfield, the Iron Age burial was only recognized through its apparent association with a distinctive pin of Irish type.

All of these possibilities might contribute towards an explanation of the phenomenon of the 'elusive dead'. But the real issue is whether it is misguided to expect a regular and recurrent burial rite in the first place. The fact that there are such in the cemeteries of eastern Yorkshire, in the cremation cemeteries of south-eastern England, or in the 'Durotrigan' cemeteries of south Dorset does not mean that other rites were not prevalent at the same time. Perhaps the problem is not so much the failure of evidence for burials to register in the archaeological record, but our failure to recognize the evidence for what it is.

### 'CASUAL' HUMAN DEPOSITS

Human remains, whether whole skeletons, articulated fragments, or individual bones, have been recovered from pits and enclosure ditches on both hillforts and settlements from the earliest excavations, so that the existence of this dataset has been well known for many years. In the case of pit burials, a distinction needs to be drawn between groups of burials in pits and occasional burials in groups of pits. The former, though sometimes relatively few in number, could be regarded as small cemeteries; the latter hardly qualify as such, since they occur seemingly at random among a complexity of domestic

features. The latter have been regarded as anomalous for two reasons. First, because only a small proportion of pits actually contain human remains, it follows that the pit group as a whole was not dedicated exclusively or primarily to the disposal of the dead. Second, the fact that a significant number of pit deposits are not of whole skeletons, but partial remains or just single bones, violates modern perceptions of 'normal' burial. The conclusion therefore is that these pits were not custom-built for the interment of human remains, but were re-used once they had ceased to serve their primary purpose, which, following Bersu's (1940) interpretation of pits at Little Woodbury in Wiltshire as underground grain silos, has been generally accepted as storage of agricultural produce. Not thus defined by their arbitrary context, these burials of human remains could be related to similar deposits found in enclosure ditches, in scoops or hollows around settlements, or in structural postholes.

Because they do not conform to the expectations of a regular burial rite, early investigators often regarded such burials as 'casual', an extraordinary inference, even allowing for the fact that they might appear to depart from expected norms. That view was exemplified in an overview of Iron Age Wiltshire:

Burial practices appear to remain of little interest to the population... bodies were *simply flung into convenient pits or ditches along with other household rubbish*, although it could always be argued that burials placed in pits had some religious significance.

(Cunliffe, 1973: 423–4, *my italics*)

Where indifference was not implied, then interpretations favoured social outcasts or criminals who had not been accorded the 'normal' rites. If, however, we suspend the expectation that the dead should invariably have been accorded a single, designated place or manner of disposal, and that their remains should be preserved as an entity, then the possibility opens up that the apparently very irregular testimony of the archaeological record may reflect practices that accorded with regular social norms.

## DEFINING BURIAL

A major issue plainly is our definition of a burial. At one end of the spectrum of archaeological deposits are complete skeletons in graves, whether singly or as part of a cemetery, that would without question be accepted as a burial. At the other end are individual human bones, or fragments of human bones, found in pits, ditches, or miscellaneous occupational strata that may have no contextual evidence or artefactual association to indicate that they constituted a deliberate deposit in any meaningful sense of burial. Between these polar

extremes human remains in varying degrees of articulation are found in a variety of contexts. Even where most of the body is intact, it is not uncommon to find certain parts missing. In the past it has been assumed that this results from incompetent excavation or post-depositional agricultural damage or the like, and there are plainly many instances where this is the correct explanation. But even under controlled conditions of recovery the same phenomenon has been observed, so that we are forced to the conclusion that some fragmentation and dispersal was 'an integral part of mortuary practice' in European prehistory (Larsson, 2009: 111).

The idea of deliberate fragmentation is not new. John Chapman (2000) in particular developed the concept of 'enchainment' through fragmentation of artefacts or human remains for the south-east European Neolithic, and it has been variously discussed in the context of European prehistory (Chapman and Gaydarska, 2007; Rebay-Salisbury et al., 2010). In some cemeteries burials have been uncovered in which there appears to have been a measure of selectivity or recurrence in the removal of particular body parts. Various reasons might be advanced for this practice, which could be linked to the process of defleshing of the body, or to the practice of excarnation. In any event, most commentators would probably base their definition of burials on context rather than the quantity of surviving human remains. Even in the case of cremations in urns, the percentage of burnt bone included is often small relative to the expected residue of a human cremation, so that logically partial inhumations should hardly be excluded on grounds of incompleteness.

Cenotaph memorials have sometimes been posited in the total absence of remains, which cannot be explained simply through poor conditions of preservation. But where such 'graves' without burials occur in some numbers, as at Fison Way, Thetford, Norfolk (Gregory, 1992), we might infer some special ritual or anomalous circumstances. The possibility remains that graves without burials, 'representations of graves' (Danielsson et al., 2009: 11), could have been one variant rite among diverse funerary conventions, even when the body was not missing, but was subject to some other treatment. We shall consider the issue of hoards as 'grave-goods without graves' in due course.

But if we do not demand complete body remains, where do we draw the line? If the key is evidence that the remains were deliberately deposited, why should we assume that a human femur in the bottom of an enclosure ditch was not deliberately placed there as a ritual deposit in a liminal location? Would it make a difference if it was casually flung into the ditch, or if it was flung into the ditch as a profoundly symbolic gesture? Brück (1995: 253) took it as axiomatic that fragmentary human remains were not the product of 'normative burial rituals' but that they were 'used as a source of metaphor in various contexts'. But this is surely a distinction based upon our own perception of what constitutes a funerary norm, whereas in prehistory it is possible that disposal of the dead in some circumstances could have entailed fragmentation

of the remains in the course of the 'normal' funerary process and their distribution in a series of metaphorical deposits. We must not impose our own expectations of standardized practice on prehistory, and even if this was a minority practice, or one of a number of minority practices, that does not make it 'abnormal'.

An important criterion from the archaeologist's perspective is the *recurrence* of a set of actions, whether dictated by formal rules or social convention, since it is through recurrence that significant patterns are recognized. This might be witnessed archaeologically most obviously by a regular mode of disposition and orientation of a body within a grave, or by the inclusion of grave-goods or particular cuts of meat, perhaps even placed in particular relationship to the deceased in the grave. But even where this occurs within cemeteries there are commonly graves with different orientation, and the inclusion of particular grave-goods or meat offerings is often limited to a relatively small percentage of graves. Even in the cemeteries of the Aylesford series there is rather greater diversity of practice than archaeological classification might imply.

The basic misconception that lies at the root of the problem, therefore, is that past societies should have buried their dead according to a regular and recurrent convention, that is, that each period should be characterized by a recognizable burial rite and grave type that represents the dominant convention. Where such a recurrent form of burial is absent, rather than supposing that the rite adopted was one that fortuitously did not result in a permanent impact on the archaeological record, we should challenge the basic assumption, that there should ever have been a regular and recurrent form of burial, as opposed to a variety of different ways of disposing of the dead, each according to custom, need, or circumstance. In fact, might there not have been a variety of ways of disposing of any one individual? If that individual was highly regarded in life and potentially still capable of exerting influence over the living in death, might not there be reasons for distributing his or her mortal remains in more than one location? We have already noted that late pre-Roman Iron Age cremation burials often contain only a small proportion of the cremated residue. Are we really to believe that, having gone to the extent of organizing a complex funerary ritual, those responsible could not be bothered to gather up the bulk of the cremated remains? Or was a token sample all that was required or permitted for burial, with the residue being dedicated to some other end? If that was the case, might it not also have applied to non-cremated remains?

Instead of imagining regular and recurrent rites that left no trace archaeologically, therefore, we should instead recognize that there was a multiplicity of rites, many of which did not involve the segregation of the dead into a special location, but which included depositing the dead or fragmentary remains of the dead in domestic and settlement contexts where they remained integrated

with the living community. We are often told by anthropologists that the living and the dead do not easily cohabit, but the archaeological evidence from Iron Age Britain may suggest otherwise, that far from fearing and distancing themselves from the dead, some communities distributed the remains of their forebears around them, where they might constitute a benign or even protective presence. Since ethnographic evidence suggests that it is often the 'limbo period', between death and the point at which only dry bones remain, during which the dead are commonly feared as malevolent forces, this may have involved temporary burial or exposure for an interim period, after which the bones, complete or fragmentary, were given final burial in or around the settlement. Hillforts would have afforded an obvious secure location for an interim stage of interment or exposure.

As for animal burials, again represented both by complete or near-complete skeletons and by partial or fragmentary remains, their inclusion in human graves, and not simply as meat offerings, was apparently part of the funerary ritual. But where they occur, articulated or otherwise, in pits, as they do regularly on settlement sites, their purpose is plainly debatable. Here recurrence of practice could result from domestic waste being disposed of in ordered ways determined by convention, rather than indicating any special ritual significance. Demonstrating the difference archaeologically is likely to prove extremely difficult.

## UTES OF DEPOSITION AND DISPOSAL

Where formal burials occur, the dominant rite in the earlier and middle Iron Age in Britain, as indeed it was in continental Europe, was individual inhumation. In the later pre-Roman Iron Age, again in common with much of north Alpine Europe, cremation is re-introduced to become the predominant convention. What governed these changes in fashion can only be surmised. The choice of rite may be determined by attitudes towards death and the afterlife, or may reflect prevailing social and political stability or its absence, with cremation calculated to accelerate the destruction of mortal remains in circumstances in which longer term observances cannot be assured.

Cremation and inhumation are alternative rites that are variously represented in the prehistory of north Alpine Europe from the Neolithic onwards, sometimes occurring together in the same region at the same time, even in apparently contemporary 'bi-ritual' burials (Harding, 2000: 111–12), though not of the same individual, and more often with one rite predominating. Even in the British Iron Age there are instances of cremations and inhumations (of different persons) being included in the same grave. In Europe cremation became almost ubiquitous with the Urnfield phase of the Late Bronze Age, but

the Urnfield phenomenon never extended to Britain, where the limited and localized occurrence of cemeteries in the Late Bronze Age represents a late survival of Middle Bronze Age cremation practices. Inhumation re-asserts itself in continental Europe in the cemeteries of the Hallstatt Iron Age, a phenomenon that again makes minimal archaeological impact in Britain. Nevertheless, burials of the earlier and middle Iron Age in Britain overwhelmingly observe the rite of inhumation until the late pre-Roman Iron Age, where the practice of cremation is once again adopted in those areas of southern and south-eastern England that were in closest contact with the late La Tène societies of continental Europe.

Contemporary western practice might lead us to expect that funerary ritual entailed essentially a single, defined episode involving commemoration of the dead and disposal. Ethnographic analogies, however, suggest the possibility of more protracted and complex funerary processes, perhaps involving temporary inhumation or excarnation, so that there could be interim stages before final disposal in whatever form. We are also accustomed to the assumption that the dead should be treated as an entity, however their remains are disposed of, whereas in the Iron Age this may commonly not have been the case.

A major problem in recognizing a recurrent burial convention has been a presumption that burials should be assigned to a special location, dedicated to a community of the dead and conforming to our preconception of what should constitute a cemetery. The fact that this has been the dominant convention for the past 2,000 years, with the notable exclusion of certain categories of individual such as criminals or unbaptized children, does not mean that this practice was universal in prehistory. On the contrary, the archaeological evidence for burial practices in Iron Age Britain suggests a broad division between those who were *segregated* into communities of the dead in dedicated cemeteries, and those who were *integrated* into the communities of the living, in graves or pits within settlements or in supposedly liminal positions like enclosure ditches or entrances. The fact that the remains following excarnation might be distributed in several different locations might seem even more irregular. What prompted the burial of some individuals in segregated cemeteries and others to be integrated within the environs of settlements is probably unknowable, but we should not assume that one practice implies greater respect for the dead than the other.

Within the broad category of segregated cemeteries, we should recognize that not all graves need to have been in a tightly clustered group. Cemeteries are cumulative, unless violence or disease results in simultaneous or near-simultaneous multiple deaths, and must therefore have begun with just one or two burials, or perhaps a small group of burials of curated remains forming the nucleus of a cemetery that subsequently attracted more burials. Even the few initial graves need not have been in close proximity, depending upon what layout was chosen and who qualified to be buried in a given plot. We shall see

several examples of how cemeteries may have developed from small groups, quite widely spaced, that may reflect their origin in kin-related but segregated groups. How cemeteries grew over time is not always clear, and the Münsingen model of linear expansion (Hodson, 1968; Müller, 1998) is not the only possibility. Furthermore, depending on political or economic circumstances, settlement stability may have been disrupted, so that incipient cemeteries could have been abandoned, resulting in what archaeologically appears to be a handful of dispersed graves. For much of Britain, of course, the number of known small groups of burials, though increasing, is at present far too few to account for more than a very limited minority of the Iron Age population. Without proposing any rigid classification, therefore, we may provisionally refer to larger or more ordered sites as cemeteries and smaller numbers of more irregularly arranged graves as burial grounds. Clearly, however, graves could also occur in isolation, though circumstances of excavation do not always allow clearance on a sufficient scale to confirm whether a grave is isolated or part of a group.

Even where grouped burials do conform to our perception of a cemetery, it is frequently remarked that the remains represented do not correspond to a 'normal' demographic profile, that is, the proportions by age-group or sex that might be expected from a representative cross-section of the community. Yet there is no basis for assuming that any Iron Age cemetery should mirror society in this way, and in the case of smaller burial grounds the number of graves self-evidently cannot account for the estimated population of adjacent settlements over the period of time represented, so that *selectivity* must be implicit in the surviving data-base, whether determined by age, sex, social status, kin, cult affiliation, or craft or occupational associations.

In the late pre-Roman Iron Age in southern and south-eastern Britain, where larger settlements were acquiring the characteristics of incipient urban communities, it is perhaps hardly surprising that cemeteries like the King Harry Lane site at Verulamium (Stead and Rigby, 1989) should have come into existence by the early first century AD. Elsewhere, in northern and western Britain, where communities would have been much smaller and more widely dispersed, burial practice may have been more varied and there may have been no communal regulation of burial or tradition of burial in a common, dedicated location. Formal cemeteries (outside the Arras group of eastern Yorkshire) may have been a relatively late development in Britain, but the rites of disposal appear to have endured the social disruption of the Roman conquest. Cremation cemeteries like King Harry Lane continued into the later first century AD largely unchanged in terms of funerary practice, reflecting only the greater ease of acquisition of Roman material goods. Likewise the 'Durotrigan' tradition in south Dorset continued largely unchanged, as exemplified at Alington Avenue (Davies et al., 2002) and Poundbury (Farwell and Mollison, 1993) in Dorchester, where the cemeteries continued to be used throughout the Roman period. This may seem surprising since cremation

cemeteries of the Aylesford–Swarling convention and Durotrigan inhumation burials were themselves relatively late introductions, and it is not at all clear how either relate to whatever were the prevailing conventions for disposal of the dead for the best part of a millennium before that. One respect in which the Roman occupation would certainly have had an impact is in the requirement for formal disposal of the dead and the encouragement of regular cemeteries. Any practices that involved the distribution of the remains of the dead, particularly in and around settlements, would surely have been discouraged or suppressed. But it is clear that southern and south-eastern Britain had been in regular contact with the Roman-occupied world in the century before the conquest, with profound effects not only on the economy but also on indigenous political structure and social practices, so that it seems likely that the most important changes had already taken root well before the Claudian invasion.

## MEMORIALS OF THE DEAD AND SYMBOLS OF IDENTITY

An alternative role of burial, of course, is the creation of a monument to commemorate the dead, or focused on which the living can pay their continuing respects or assert their communal identity. In certain circumstances it is possible that major funerary monuments, like the *Fürstengräber* of the late Hallstatt period in west central Europe, also served as a means of legitimizing the authority of the ruling regime. As Arnold argued, late Hallstatt

tumuli were intended to function as highly visible communal monuments. They advertised the seniority and importance of the lineages . . . which erected them. Their conspicuous location along major routes of transportation (often on terraces clearly visible from a considerable distance) and their additional demarcation by means of rings of stones and stele, supports this interpretation.

(Arnold, 1995: 45)

In Britain there are relatively few burial mounds that could be described as monumental in scale, though their location at prominent sites in the landscape or at territorial boundaries or the intersection of tracks or waterways might have enhanced their visibility. As statements of identity and legitimacy of a ruling lineage, it might be argued that societies that felt the need to create distinctive burials were essentially unstable internally or politically insecure, and that this might explain the absence for much of the British Iron Age of distinctive and recurrent forms of burial, if insular communities did not feel such a need. The fact that more conspicuous burials appear in the late pre-Roman Iron Age in those parts of southern Britain that first came into contact with the Roman world might well be evidence in support of this view.



## STATUS AND HIERARCHY

The assumption that status might be inferred from burials is based on a belief that Iron Age society was hierarchical, with chiefs or kings at the top of the social pyramid, supported by an aristocratic elite who controlled resources and their redistribution, thereby sustaining their dominance over the subordinate population. The hierarchical model gained credibility from post-war research on the princely burials (*Fürstengräber*) and strongholds (*Fürstensitze*) of the western late Hallstatt zone (Kimmig, 1969), the authority of the elite in this instance being based on control of a prestige goods economy, notably involving Mediterranean imports associated with feasting and drinking (Frankenstein and Rowlands, 1978). The model was doubtless oversimplified, and has rightly been challenged. More recently, the corpus of evidence for late Hallstatt burial in south-west Germany has been reviewed by Burmeister (2000), who has argued for a more subtle social hierarchy, involving distinctions of age and sex as well as apparent social status.

It is a common assumption that the status of the dead in life is reflected in the size and grandeur of their graves, and more particularly in the number and quality of accompanying grave-goods. This latter inference is seldom subject to rigorous scrutiny, or any attempt to distinguish between the different components of the grave assemblage and what purpose they might have been intended to serve, by whom or on whose behalf. If indeed the deceased was highly regarded in life, then it seems likely that his or her achievements would have been celebrated in the funerary process in many ways that cannot survive archaeologically, in stories, music, or dance, for example, and in rituals that may have been protracted over a considerable period of time. Such rituals might have included a formal 'laying out' stage, prior to final deposition, when appropriate possessions or gifts might have been displayed, rather than incorporating them into the grave.

Acknowledging therefore that the grave itself represents only the final stage in a potentially protracted process, nevertheless we might expect the size of a barrow mound or ditched enclosure to reflect the importance accorded to a burial, together with the size or elaboration of the burial chamber. In the context of a formal cemetery the relationship of the grave to others may indicate its communal affiliations or social priority. Standing alone, a simple grave may appear relatively insignificant, whereas a larger and more conspicuous monument, especially if located strategically in the landscape, may have been intended to signal a more powerful message, though not necessarily regarding the status of the incumbent dead. The treatment of the dead, whether a specially dressed or arranged inhumation, or cremation in a special container like a bucket or cauldron, might equally signify the status or entitlement of the deceased.

For continental Europe it would be possible to cite numerous instances from the Late Bronze Age through the Hallstatt and La Tène Iron Ages,

though statistically still a small minority, of burials within cemeteries that were outstanding in terms of size, structure, and contents of the burial chamber and treatment of the dead, which are generally interpreted as evidence of a hierarchical social structure. The absence in Britain of conspicuous burials by contrast, apart from a select few from eastern Yorkshire, until the late pre-Roman Iron Age might be attributed to a more egalitarian social structure. But the doubt remains as to whether what we might regard as measures of material wealth or status correlate with the priorities of Iron Age communities, and whether they chose to signal social status through burial and grave associations.

It seems more probable that status in Iron Age society was measured in terms of land holding or numbers of stock, or reputation of individuals in terms of martial skills and achievements. From evidence adduced by Karl (2006b) regarding contracts and legal obligations between individuals, it seems likely that the number of contractual dependants would also have been an important measure of an individual's status, which would be hard to quantify archaeologically. It is clear that there were a number of grades of dependency (Karl, 2006a), the lowest of which, servants or serfs, was only just above the status of slavery. Above these ranked tenants, who paid rent to their landlords, but were otherwise self-supporting. Clients rented capital, as opposed to land, whilst at the top of the scale of dependency were retainers (*ambaxtos*) to whom resources were transferred by way of a gift in return for services. This complex system of dependency was evidently in part the product of, and means of coping with the consequences of, a system of partitive inheritance, with its built-in propensity for downward social mobility if several heirs survived to maturity. A person of higher social status, therefore, was likely to have a number of dependants of varying degrees, so that it is possible that artefacts deposited in apparently 'rich' grave assemblages were in part contributed by those who owed the deceased some debt or obligation incurred under contractual conventions.

### 'GRAVE-GOODS'

A common assumption that grave-goods may reflect the role or status of the deceased in life may not be without foundation, but often glosses over important issues regarding the source and purpose of objects that are found in graves. It should be stressed, of course, that a large number of graves in the British Iron Age contain minimal if any grave-goods, on the basis of which next to nothing can be inferred about the burial and its social implications. Where grave-goods do occur, however, too often inferences are based upon the simplistic assumption that they 'belonged' to the individual buried in the grave. Apart from issues of ownership, and the extent to which an individual's

material effects included disposable wealth as opposed to those communal goods that were in his or her custody by virtue of social role or position within the community, it is not self-evident that the assemblage placed in a grave represented the estate of the dead, or gifts by dependants and mourners in honour of the dead, or were offerings to placate spirits of the otherworld, or were simply necessary accompaniments demanded by funerary convention. Yet social inferences are intuitively made from material artefacts, or as Fitzpatrick (2000) aptly caricatured it, 'grave-goods speak for the dead'. The commonest example of this mode of interpretation sees graves with weapons as 'warrior burials'. Now it might be pedantic if not perverse to argue that an individual who in death was equipped with sword, spear, shield, and even chain mail, but little or nothing else, did not have some association with the martial arts in life. But in Britain especially there are relatively few burials in which the material associations are quite so unequivocal. And there is always the exception, like the child of 3–4 years buried at Gravelly Guy, Oxfordshire, with a spearhead, hardly indicative of achieved warrior status, though conceivably reflecting aspirations. Equally, a good case can be made on the basis of skeletal analyses for believing that mirror burials were predominantly if not exclusively female. But there are many cases in which the artefact combinations are equivocal, like Bryher in the Isles of Scilly, for example (Johns, 2003), where sword, scabbard, and shield occur among other artefacts in the same grave as a decorated mirror. We may sympathize in general with the rationale of Hunter's argument:

The burial of grave goods was not a neutral act: they were intended to carry meanings, and I interpret the primary meaning as giving the deceased the persona of a warrior. Whether the individuals bore arms in life is irrelevant: this is the image they took to the grave.

(Hunter, 2005: 50)

But we would hardly extend this argument to suggest that, where the individual was accompanied instead by multiple *amphorae*, dinner service, and joints of meat, the intention was to give the deceased the persona of a drunk and a glutton, and where weapons are included as well, an aggressive drunk and glutton. The signal being transmitted was undoubtedly complex and subtle, so that any one explanation risks being simplistic.

In analysing the grave associations of the late pre-Roman Iron Age cemetery at King Harry Lane, Millett made the important suggestion that grave-goods might not be the 'possessions' of the dead, but tributes from the mourners:

If we follow the suggestion . . . that the grave goods were deposited by people attending the burial, then it becomes possible to think of them as representing not the wealth the dead person controlled in life as conventionally assumed, but instead the size of their social

network. The group making offerings may have comprised both the family and clients who may well have been depositing objects which symbolized the donor rather than the dead. (Millett, 1993: 275–6)

From this he drew the important inference that the number of grave-goods might reflect the size of social network of the deceased, which, of course, might also be a measure of the latter's wealth and social status, even if indirectly. He also recognized that on this rationale gender recognition on the basis of artefactual associations in graves might be suspect, though here we should surely make the distinction between grave-goods that accompany the burial and those that actually are part of the dressing of the body. A progressive decline in the number of grave-goods in later cemeteries might thus be explained as a consequence of settlement nucleation, resulting in the disruption of former kinship networks, or indeed of social disruption caused by political instability on the eve of the conquest.

Even this explanation, however, focuses too heavily on the final stage in the funerary process, the act of deposition. Excavation of late pre-Roman Iron Age funerary sites in the past twenty-five years has progressively shown that the funerary process could have been a protracted one, involving a series of important stages, such as laying out or lying in state, funerary feasting and drinking, presenting the deceased suitably clad and adorned, assembling artefacts of accompaniment, and animals, perhaps themselves treated in a special sacrificial ritual on a funeral pyre, and only finally depositing a selection of remains and perhaps further grave-goods in the grave pit itself. It has even been argued that there could have been a symbolic stage of destruction at some later point in time. Within this complex set of stages, it does seem simplistic to assume that it is the surviving grave-goods of the final stage alone that signal the persona of the deceased, when we might have argued that it was the assemblage that accompanied him or her when lying in state or on the pyre that best reflected this. Whether grave-goods were gifts provided by kin, tokens of regard from the wider community network, or even debts repaid by clients, we should ask why it might have been legitimate in certain circumstances to destroy them after the event. If offerings included the repayment of debts by clients, then their destruction might be a telling gesture of conspicuous consumption or symbol of release from the debt.

It is widely recognized that objects found in graves may be old when buried, so that archaeologists are rightly cautious in using typology or ornament, indicative of period of manufacture, as anything more than a *terminus post quem* for their deposition or for the date of the grave. Whether objects were consciously treasured as heirlooms, and if so why they were eventually taken out of circulation and incorporated among grave-goods, is of course unclear. It may be that an object, albeit handed down over several generations, was particularly associated with the deceased. Or it may be that special artefacts,

like their owners or custodians, were seen as having a life-cycle, which in the fullness of time reached its due end. This might certainly be argued where, for example, a sword is bent double, or ritually destroyed, when deposited in the grave. It is possible that other items were likewise decommissioned on burial, though it may be difficult to distinguish damage deliberately inflicted at time of deposit from damage incurred over time or in the process of discovery. Whole and intact pottery vessels, for example, may easily have been broken through taphonomic effects over time, but where near-complete vessels are found missing some fragments this may not always have resulted from the incompetence of excavators. In any event, objects that were 'decommissioned' were evidently not expected to serve in any imagined afterlife, or journey thereto, so that these must constitute separate categories among grave-goods.

### INHERITANCE AND 'OWNERSHIP'

One aspect of death that is seldom considered in the context of archaeological burial practices is the question of inheritance, which itself of course raises again the issue of ownership in Iron Age society. It seems likely that a distinction was made between land and moveable estate, with control of the conventions regarding inheritance of the former being linked to the larger kin group. In the context of early Irish kinship, Charles-Edwards (1993) interpreted the legal evidence as indicating that land as a general principle was divided equally between the sons of recognized unions, but that moveable property and acquisitions were divided between both sons and daughters. Even with moveable property, however, it is possible that some further distinction might have applied between goods inherited through the kin group and those assets that may have been acquired by the deceased from personal activities such as spoils of conflict, the latter perhaps being regarded as disposable. Classical sources give us too little information to make any inferences, while the Irish sources show some significant differences from Welsh in the early historic period, so that it would be unwise to transpose models based on these regions into pre-Roman Britain, where different conventions again may have pertained. Both, nevertheless, are worth serious consideration at the same level as ethnographic or historical sources, that is, subject to due critical limitations. Archaeologically there is little evidence in the British Iron Age, and certainly not in southern and eastern Britain, for the effects of partitive inheritance upon the Iron Age landscape, though apparently conjoined round-houses and in Roman Britain the occasional appearance of 'unit' villas (Harding, 2004: 161–2) might hint at the effects of joint inheritance. Even within the later Irish and Welsh laws there appears to have been some provision for adjustment in the interests of and subject to the agreement of the

kin group, though again these sources should not be regarded as necessarily indicative of conventions in earlier Iron Age Britain.

With regard to status, it is clear from classical sources that land-holding was an important measure of status, perhaps more so than the possession of moveable assets. Caesar's account of the role of druids in resolving disputes and administering justice (*DBG*, VI, 13) includes the resolution of disputes '*de heriditate*', over inheritance. It is clear archaeologically that some artefacts, especially weaponry and parade armour, were treasured over generations, as witnessed by the repairs and therefore ultimately composite character of items like the Standlake scabbard (Harding, 2007: 110). It is sometimes suggested that special artefacts like swords were imbued with their own personality—a notion later embodied in literature in Arthur's Excalibur—and in the case of the La Tène sword from Port in Switzerland engraved in Greek letters interpreted as the Celtic name Korisios (Wyss, 1958), it is quite possible that the name was not that of the sword-smith or the warrior owner, but of the sword itself. It could therefore be that there were special circumstances that made it appropriate for an artefact to be buried with the deceased and inappropriate for it to be bequeathed to someone else. In some cemeteries of the European Iron Age, notably in Celt-Iberian central Spain (Lorrio, 1997), but also notably in the sword with scabbard decorated in Waldalgesheim style from Filottrano, Ancona, in Italy, swords are bent double to signify their ritual decommissioning or 'death' alongside the human dead, and swords from hoards in the European Iron Age have sometimes been treated in a similar way. The same practice is especially prolific in the Picardy ritual sites, but here it may be the result of destruction of war trophies rather than sympathetic deposition. In Britain this practice is uncommon, though it is known in the middle Iron Age burial from Acklam in Yorkshire (Dent, 1983; Stead, 2006: 189). Whatever its significance, and whether or not the swords 'belonged' to the deceased, the act of destruction was presumably performed as part of the funerary ritual.

## CEMETERIES AND DEMOGRAPHY

Demographic calculations have plainly been hampered by the lack of a regular and recurrent burial rite for much of Iron Age Britain, and research on the composition of cemeteries, where they do exist, suggests caution in drawing inferences from cemetery populations regarding the living communities that they reflect. Specialist reports frequently stress the fact that the age and sex balance of cemeteries does not reflect the expectations of a 'normal' community, so that some measure of selectivity must have been in force. This most obviously applies to infants, who are seldom represented more than minimally in cemeteries, and only then in contexts that might be regarded as peripheral.

Among the classic continental cemeteries Münsingen-Rain is best known for its linear layout along a ridge, which enabled the principles of horizontal stratigraphy to be applied to its artefact seriation (Hodson, 1968). Of the 220 graves revealed by the nineteenth-century excavations, around three-quarters included grave-goods, thereby enabling a sound chronological sequence to be established from La Tène A2 to C2, in absolute terms from around 420 BC to 180 BC. Recent re-examination on the basis of osteopathology of the skeletal remains has revealed anatomical similarities and anomalies that could be epigeneric (Alt et al., 2005; Müller et al., 2008). Though there is no comparative evidence available for the settlement that used the cemetery, the above average morphological homogeneity of the skeletons examined suggested the presence of two 'founder families' whose members spanned the duration of the cemetery's use. Close generic links between the women in graves 40, 130, 141, 157, and 173, for example, demonstrated a sequential distribution through the cemetery. As regards evidence of hierarchy, the graves in the Münsingen cemetery, in common with many La Tène cemeteries in north Alpine Europe, were not lavishly furnished, and apart from a few burials with weapons, did not suggest any marked social distinction. Müller et al., however, argued that stable communities may not have required prestigious status symbols to sustain them in the same way that less stable hierarchies might, so that a seemingly egalitarian cemetery might nevertheless have served an exclusive group within the local community.

Within Britain the issue of dating is evidently crucial in the case of the La Tène cemeteries of eastern Yorkshire, where the conservative dating based upon artefact assessment has now been challenged by a new series of AMS radiocarbon dates (Jay et al., 2012), which suggest a much shorter time-span. According to this re-assessment the major cemetery at Wetwang Slack would have been in use for no more than 150 years, so that its 446 graves could have served a population a little over a hundred, depending upon the estimate of average life expectancy. These calculations always assume, of course, that the mortality rate was stable, discounting the effects of interpersonal violence, disease, or natural disasters, one or other of which almost certainly would have distorted the pattern, though perhaps not of a scale order to nullify the outcome. What recent research has not established, of course, is the lifespan of the adjacent settlement, whether it too was shorter than formerly believed, or whether the occupants of the earliest and latest phases of settlement have joined the ranks of the 'elusive dead'. With an average household of five or six persons, the eighty round-houses recorded at Garton-Wetwang could have served a population of 100 persons over a period of 150 years, if each house lasted 35–40 years, or a population half that size for twice as long, if the conventional time-span between 400 and 100 BC is preferred. It needs to be noted that the recent radiocarbon dating programme, despite all efforts at representative sampling, may have missed the earliest or latest graves in the cemetery, so that the evidence still needs to be weighed carefully.

In the later pre-Roman Iron Age cemeteries the dominant rite of cremation presents further complications for demographic calculations. At Westhampnett, West Sussex, Fitzpatrick (1997) reckoned that the cemetery of 121 cremations spanned a period of just 40–60 years, representing a population at any given time around 85–95. In consequence, in the absence of a larger known settlement of hillfort or village size in the immediate neighbourhood, he concluded that it must have served several farmsteads communally. This, of course, begs the question whether all were entitled to access to the cemetery. Though a spectrum of age-groups and both sexes was represented, with infants not totally excluded though statistically under-represented, it still does not follow that all sections of the community were treated in the same way, so that the cemetery, like Münsingen, might represent a much smaller proportion of a larger community catchment.

The King Harry Lane cemetery at Verulamium was substantially larger with 455 cremations and 17 inhumations, spanning a period from the late decades BC to Neronian times. The excavators thus calculated the population represented by the cemetery as around 200, well below their estimate of the population of Verulamium at the time. Once again, therefore, the figures suggest selective access, or perhaps the existence of other cemeteries in the neighbourhood. There were 24 graves of children under 12 years of age and three neonates under six months, so that the young and very young were not excluded, though again these figures surely under-represent mortality in those age-groups in the population at large.

## BURIALS AND ETHNIC OR CULTURAL ENTITIES

For an older generation of archaeologists the equation of funerary rites and burial practices with ethnic or cultural entities was implicit. The Arras cemeteries of eastern Yorkshire were regarded as those of immigrants from continental Europe where chariot burials and square-ditched barrows were also characteristic of the early and middle La Tène Iron Age. The fact that the Yorkshire burials differed in significant detail from their continental counterparts and lacked any evidence for material imports argued against their direct introduction by immigrant settlers, but the apparently concentrated distribution still makes an appealing case for a coherent population entity, even if the funerary rite was adopted through other agencies than immigration. Likewise for an earlier generation the cremation cemeteries in the late pre-Roman Iron Age in south-eastern England were the insular counterpart to those of Belgic Gaul, and the product of settlement alluded to by Caesar, an interpretation that would now be regarded as a gross oversimplification of complex social



and economic processes and cross-channel relationships. For much of the rest of Britain, however, no such glib equations between burial evidence, at least as conventionally classified in the past, and cultural or ethnic entities would be remotely tenable.

### IDENTITY, 'PERSONHOOD', AND '(IN)DIVIDUALITY'

The importance of identity has been very much at the forefront of debate in British prehistoric archaeology in recent years, and more specifically the concept of 'personhood' (Fowler, 2004), the condition of 'being' expressed through social practices in life and in death. Identity is not seen as solely inherited or immutable, but something that develops over time as a result of relationships with other people, places, or objects. The idea that a focus on individuality, and the rights and responsibility of the individual, was a post-Enlightenment development of the western philosophical tradition (Danielsson, 2009: 73–4) surely underrates the significance of individuality in the classical world, but it is nevertheless conceivable that in non-classical, Iron Age societies the idea of personhood was embedded more within relationships to the kin group and the natural environment. The notion that personhood need not be confined to one physical being has given rise to the concept of 'dividuality', which would certainly be consistent with the idea that bodily remains were fragmented, with parts being disposed variously in liminal locations around a settlement. Implausible though it may indeed seem to a post-Enlightenment rationalist mind, it is now suggested that inanimate objects may have been regarded as persons in antiquity (see discussion of swords above), and that 'dividuality' might have been derived from several sources, including other people, animals, or inanimate objects (Danielsson et al., 2009). The concept of 'non-human persons' being accorded similar burial rites to selected human persons has also been articulated in the context of the 'mortuary structures' from Sutton Common in south Yorkshire (van de Noort et al., 2007). The concept of dividuality might also be relevant to the idea of re-assembled skeletons, reconstituted from the bones of more than one individual, as claimed for the later Bronze Age composite remains from Cladh Hallan in the Western Isles (Parker Pearson et al., 2007; Hanna et al., 2012). It is conceivable that this practice was more common in later prehistory than has conventionally been recognized, since composite skeletons will only be obvious if the parts are not assembled in their correct anatomical relationship, or if bones of individuals of obviously different ages or physique are combined.

## DEFINING 'RITUAL'

Archaeologists have been rightly criticized for imprecision in their use of the term 'ritual', which too often has been used as a quasi-explanation for something that archaeologically defies explanation (Insoll, 2004: 11). It can be used adjectivally, 'pertaining or relating to rites', and as a noun referring to 'a prescribed order' of religious or devotional acts. Contrary to anthropological convention, the dictionary definition of the substantive form appears to convey the meaning of religious acts. The adjectival usage, 'pertaining to rites', allows the possibility that those rites may be not exclusively sacred but secular, reflecting 'usual custom, habit or practice', that is, acts that have become regularized through long usage or convention without an overt religious dimension. Such secular conventions may still be as compelling as conventions imposed by religious custom, and ultimately both will be rooted within a belief system that may be impossible to detach from inherent religious beliefs.

Anthropological definitions of ritual tend to stress 'symbolic, non-technical, formal, prescribed, structured and repetitive' aspects (Brück, 1999: 314), the utility of which may be compromised, though not necessarily invalidated, by the fact that these attributes individually or collectively may be shared by other activities that might not normally be regarded as ritual. Morris (2012: 14) has reminded us that not all rituals involve religion, and that 'the characteristics that most "rituals" examined by social anthropologists share is that actions are formulaic'. Archaeologists have too often implicitly assumed that ritual and functional are mutually exclusive, which has encouraged 'ritual' as a default interpretation when utilitarian or functional explanations are wanting. Brück quite rightly argued that this reflects a fundamental difference between our post-Enlightenment rationality and the probable rationale of prehistoric communities, which cannot simply be reconciled by saying that ritual doubtless pervaded all aspects of everyday life in the Iron Age:

By rejecting the analytical value of the concept of ritual, we move from the vision of past society in which certain daily practices had esoteric ritual aspects, to one in which all the activities documented in the archaeological record represent people's practical engagement with material conditions, albeit based on a different set of ideas about how the world works to that enshrined in modern western thought.

(Brück 1999: 327)

Since this book, however, is written not for an Iron Age readership but for one that has been conditioned by post-Enlightenment rationalism, it may help to distinguish between archaeological deposits in which the ritual element is overt from those in which it is endemic, if only to help determine the limits of inference of archaeological evidence. In propounding his 'ladder of inference' Hawkes (1954) nowhere claimed or believed that prehistoric technology, subsistence economy, or social structure and ritual were mutually exclusive,

nor that ritual was irrational rather than functional. The hierarchy of inference is a commentary on the limitations of archaeological evidence, not an analysis of Iron Age rationality.

It may be that drawing a distinction between 'ritual' and 'secular' or 'everyday' activities in the Iron Age is an unwarranted imposition of modern attitudes on a society for which there may have been no clear division between the two, and in whose daily lives the most routine activities may have been imbued with 'ritual' implications. It is true that many activities that need not have involved consciously formalized religious rituals may nevertheless have been governed by social standards and conventions that represent one end of the spectrum of ritual. But acknowledging that Iron Age communities probably were more sensitive in everyday life to conformance to these social rituals, and the implications of failing to adhere to them, does not mean that they were incapable of distinguishing between these daily conventions and those rituals that were 'special' in the sense of being seasonal, like those that attended the agricultural cycle, or occasional, like weddings or funerals, or which might otherwise require the intercession of someone in the role of intermediary between this world and the forces controlling the otherworld. It would not be unreasonable to suppose that such intermediaries were required for funerals, or that they presided over dedicated sanctuaries like Gournay-sur-Aronde or Hayling Island, Hampshire. But it is less clear who was responsible for the 'special deposit' of animal bones in a pit at Danebury or Winnall Down. Whether this was a communal act or a personal dedication perhaps depends less upon the character of the deposit itself than upon the significance of the site where it is located, whether it is primarily a domestic settlement or a communal focus with generations of accumulated sanctity.

## CLASSICAL SOURCES

Finally, we should not ignore the classical sources, for all their recognized limitations, as a possible source of information relating to Iron Age funerary practices in the context of the belief systems of Iron Age communities. The limitations are principally threefold:

- the information was not recorded by trained ethnographers, nor necessarily based upon authenticated experience, and may simply repeat conventional attributes of non-classical, barbarian societies,
- accounts may have been corrupted wilfully, whatever basis of fact they may contain, out of bias towards barbarian practices, or in Caesar's case out of political expedience in furthering his own military and political objectives; but even without wilful corruption, Gaulish concepts will have

been transposed into those that conformed most closely to them in the classical mind,

- customs and beliefs attributed to continental Gauls and Germans need not reflect prevailing practice in Britain, and whatever writers in the first centuries BC and AD understood to be current need not be relevant to the earlier Iron Age or later Bronze Age.

Caesar has only one reference specifically to funerary practices among the Gauls, in the context of a more general excursus into Gaulish customs and beliefs:

Funera sunt pro culta Gallorum magnifica et sumptuosa, omniaque quae vivis cordi fuisse arbitrantur in ignem inferunt, etiam animalia, ac paulo supra hanc memoriam servi et clientes, quos ab eis dilectos esse constabat, iustis funeribus confectis una cremabantur.

Funerals by Gaulish standards are splendid and extravagant, and they consign to the pyre everything, even animals, that they regard as having been pleasurable to the deceased in life. And not long before living memory slaves and clients that were known to have been esteemed by them were cremated together with them at the culmination of the funerary observances.

(Caesar, *DBG*, VI, 19)

The second statement regarding the sacrifice or self-sacrifice of human dependants may have been deliberately included to disgust a Roman audience, and it is unclear whether the back reference is to the period of Posidonius as his source, or is lifted from Posidonius and therefore a reference to still earlier times (Tierney, 1960: 216). The reference to such practices in the context of a funeral pyre nevertheless implies the rite of cremation, which was not the regular rite until around the second century BC. The possibility that human sacrifice was practised is certainly an issue that will need to be considered further. Even the basic statement, however, does not assert that what was consigned to the pyre was then included in the buried deposit, nor that the pyre offerings were all the possessions of the deceased, rather than being provided by the mourners or community. It is not self-evident that the extravagance of the pyre need be translated into the final deposit.

Tacitus makes a reference to the practice of cremation among the Germans, and again it is the possessions assigned to the pyre that are accorded priority:

Funerum nulla ambitio, id solum observatur ut corpora clarorum virorum certis lignis crementur, struem rogi nec vestibus nec odoribus cumulant sua cuique arma quorundam igni et equus adicitur. Sepulchrum caespes erigit.

Funerals are not ostentatious, with the one observation that the bodies of famous men are cremated with special wood. They construct the mound of the pyre without garments or perfumes, just his arms and in some his horse is added to the flames. A mound of turf stands as the tomb.

(Tacitus, *Germania*, 27)

Several classical writers, possibly all drawing on the same source in Posidonius, allude to the alleged beliefs of the Gauls, and in particular their belief in transmigration of the spirit. In Caesar's case it is invoked to explain their reckless valour:

In primis hoc volunt persuadere, non interire animas, sed ab aliis post mortem transire ad alios, atque hoc maxime ad virtutem excitari putant metu mortis neglecto.

Above all they encourage the belief that souls do not die but after death pass from one to another, and this they regard as the greatest encouragement to resolution, having overcome the fear of death.

(Caesar, *DBG*, VI, 14)

This passage occurs in the context of Caesar's account of the role and influence of the druids, which Tierney (1960) argued may have been exaggerated by assimilating some attributes from allied groups within the learned classes, and which certainly seems at odds with the minimal role played by druids in his factual accounts of his campaigns. Since this statement is linked to the legendary fearlessness of the Gauls, it is hardly an objective observation on Gaulish beliefs in general. Nor, taking it at face value, does it specify transmigration to another human being, as opposed to animal, and the apparent significance of bulls, stags, boars, eagles, and snakes in Iron Age art and iconography could suggest other living creatures were thought of as embodying spirits of the dead. Diodorus (V, 28, 6) and Strabo (IV, IV, 4), both of whom acknowledge Posidonius as a source, refer to the same belief, and Diodorus' reference to the soul passing to another body to live a second life certainly does not presume that second life to be in a remote otherworld. In fact, the classical sources do not contradict the idea that the dead inhabited the existing world in some other manifestation, which might be consistent with the diverse and recurrent archaeological evidence for the deposition of human remains, including some complete or near-complete burials, in settlement contexts.

At the outset it may have been presumed that our purpose was to establish why archaeological investigation had failed to discover more evidence of cemeteries for much of the British Iron Age. That remains a legitimate line of enquiry, but we should also recognize the probability that funerary practice was more diverse than hitherto has been supposed, with the implication that Iron Age religious and philosophical beliefs did not envisage a simplistic division between the world of the living and an otherworld of the dead. A critical review of the archaeological evidence for the disposal of the dead may amplify our understanding of these issues.

## Mortuary practices, problems, and analysis

Archaeological investigation is sometimes likened to opening a window on to the past. The problem is that, except in cases of unexpected and sudden disaster, for example where a shipwreck has been preserved untouched or a town was engulfed by volcanic ash, the archaeologist never examines a site as it was in its living heyday, only as it was after it had been abandoned, leaving only what survives of what its occupants chose to leave behind. Burials likewise represent only what communities chose to deposit for whatever reason, modified by taphonomic factors that determine the state of surviving evidence. Other ephemeral forms of disposal, and any elaborate or protracted rituals that preceded the final act of deposition that did not involve substantive structures, will pass unremarked in the archaeological record.

### SEGREGATION VS INTEGRATION

It has been suggested in Chapter 1 that human remains may have been buried either in a dedicated cemetery where the dead were segregated or confined, perhaps in the equivalent of consecrated ground, or integrated within the environs of settlements, whether as complete or near-complete bodies or as fragmented parts or individual bones. A third option, of course, and one which would certainly contribute to the difficulty of tracing a regular burial rite archaeologically, would be segregated burial on an individual basis rather than in a community group, however small or selective. The concept of a cemetery assumes a degree of social cohesion in Iron Age practice which may not have been universal. An obvious question must be why should there have been these alternatives, and what might have governed the decision as to which alternative should be adopted? Ethnographic analogies suggest that the spirits of the dead could have been regarded as malevolent, more especially during the interim phase between death and completion of decomposition. So it might make sense

to consign the dead directly to a dedicated cemetery that was detached from the settlement, or to confine them initially within a secure location, such as a hillfort, for excarnation or interim burial, before final disposal.

In contrast with later Christian tradition, in which the graveyard defined formally consecrated ground, Iron Age cemeteries in Britain are not collectively enclosed, graves being more often grouped in small clusters, though their expansion over time was evidently in some cases like Wetwang Slack constrained by the boundaries of trackways or other landscape features. Individual graves may certainly be contained within a circular or square ditch, from which presumably the upcast formed a low mound, but where the primary purpose was as likely to have been the definition of a sacred area as the creation of a visible monument. In the late pre-Roman Iron Age in south-eastern England cemeteries may have been sub-divided as at King Harry Lane into separate compounds containing a group of individual burials, which might be interpreted as reflecting kin groups or some other common social factor. The same may have applied to some of the Durotrigan cemeteries, if dry-stone walling defining burial plots at Jordan Hill is indicative (RCHM, 1970a: 617). But in no case is the total extent of the cemetery defined by a surrounding wall or bank and ditch. This, considering that the Iron Age is notable above all else for its emphasis on enclosure, frequently attaining monumental proportions, must surely tell us something about Iron Age communities' attitude towards the dead. Even if enclosure of settlements was not exclusively, or even perhaps primarily, for defence, the need to define space and to control access was apparently paramount, a need that probably applied even to ostensibly 'open' settlements like those of the midlands gravel terraces. Yet that imperative, so compelling to living communities, did not demand overt, physical definition of the ground occupied by the dead. This, then, may suggest that the insular Iron Age dead were not feared, as ethnographic evidence might have us suppose.

Even where the dead are assigned to a cemetery separated from the settlement, this may be in relatively close proximity, as at Yarnton in Oxfordshire (Hey et al., 2011) or indeed as at Garton and Wetwang Slack. There is also some evidence for their siting immediately outside the perimeter walls of hillforts, as the presence of cemeteries at Broxmouth, Maiden Castle, Dorset, or Battlesbury Camp might suggest, outside the citadel but not beyond the community at large. At Battlesbury extensive evidence has now been uncovered for external settlement (Ellis and Powell, 2008), so that these cemeteries may have been essentially adjuncts to settlement, rather than dedicated areas that had some special sanctity. There is nothing in the insular Iron Age to compare, for example, with the Boyne valley Neolithic tombs in Ireland or the Kilmartin valley Neolithic and Bronze Age sites in Scotland, both sacred landscapes dedicated to funerary and ritual monuments on an impressive scale.

In continental Europe there are monumental barrow cemeteries in the Hallstatt Iron Age, most notably those surrounding the Heuneburg in

Baden-Württemberg, where a meaningful relationship between cemetery and hillfort seems to be implicit. As with the monumental long barrows and chambered tombs of the Neolithic (Woodward, 1993: 2), we may question whether their purpose was not much more than the simple disposal of the dead, even of an elite among the dead. But for the great majority of known Iron Age cemeteries in Britain, burial was not on a monumental scale, which is one reason why the archaeological record is so uneven and inadequate. In the British Iron Age, monumentality is witnessed notably in hillforts, and those principally in regions that are sparsely represented in formal cemeteries.

### GRAVES AS HOUSES OF THE DEAD?

In the great majority of known inhumation burials in Iron Age Britain and Europe the grave comprises little more than a pit, sufficient but no more to contain the body of the deceased, without elaboration and with minimal if any grave-goods. Cremations may be even more economical in space, with just a small, sub-circular pit containing the urned or unurned ashes and any accompanying grave-goods. At the opposite end of the spectrum stand the elaborate *Fürstengräber* of late Hallstatt Europe, in which a larger chamber, often furnished with drapes and floor coverings, afforded the dead lavishly equipped residential quarters, from which it might be inferred that Iron Age societies believed in a physical afterlife parallel to that of the living. It would be easy to discount this in the late Hallstatt tombs as an idea imported from Etruscan Italy, and not therefore endemic to north Alpine Iron Age societies, but the concept of a house of the dead evidently had more deeply rooted origins in the European and British Bronze Age and earlier. A similar idea re-emerges in the late La Tène aristocratic tombs of northern France, Belgium, and Luxembourg, such as Clemency (Metzler et al., 1991) and Goebange-Nospelt (Metzler et al., 2009), where the burial chambers included furniture of hearth and home as well as food and drink in much the same choreographed layout as the earlier Iron Age series. The libation flues inferred at d'Estrées-Deniécourt (Somme) (Prilaux, 2007) especially imply the idea of the grave as the home of the dead that must be kept adequately provisioned.

In Britain only the elaborate tombs of the Welwyn series of the first century AD or burials like those at Stanway aspire to similar standards of elaboration. The very concept of a defined space with material provisions for the dead seems to contradict the idea of spiritual release that is implicit in the lack of physical evidence for burial for much of the British Iron Age. How long these provisioned chambers were intended to serve, of course, is uncertain, and they may have been designed to contain the dead only during that interim period until the spirit was deemed to have been released. The late appearance of more



elaborate burials in Britain may simply be a measure of insular isolation from continental influence through the earlier Iron Age. In any event, larger chamber graves tend not to be a characteristic of formal cemetery organization, where the congregation of larger numbers of burials by definition requires a measure of economy of space in their organization. Chamber graves belong rather to the category of memorials or monumental statements that may have been favoured at particular times of social or political upheaval to reinforce the credentials of a ruling elite, rather than to a regular class of burials in which economic disposal is a basic consideration.

## FUNERARY RITUAL

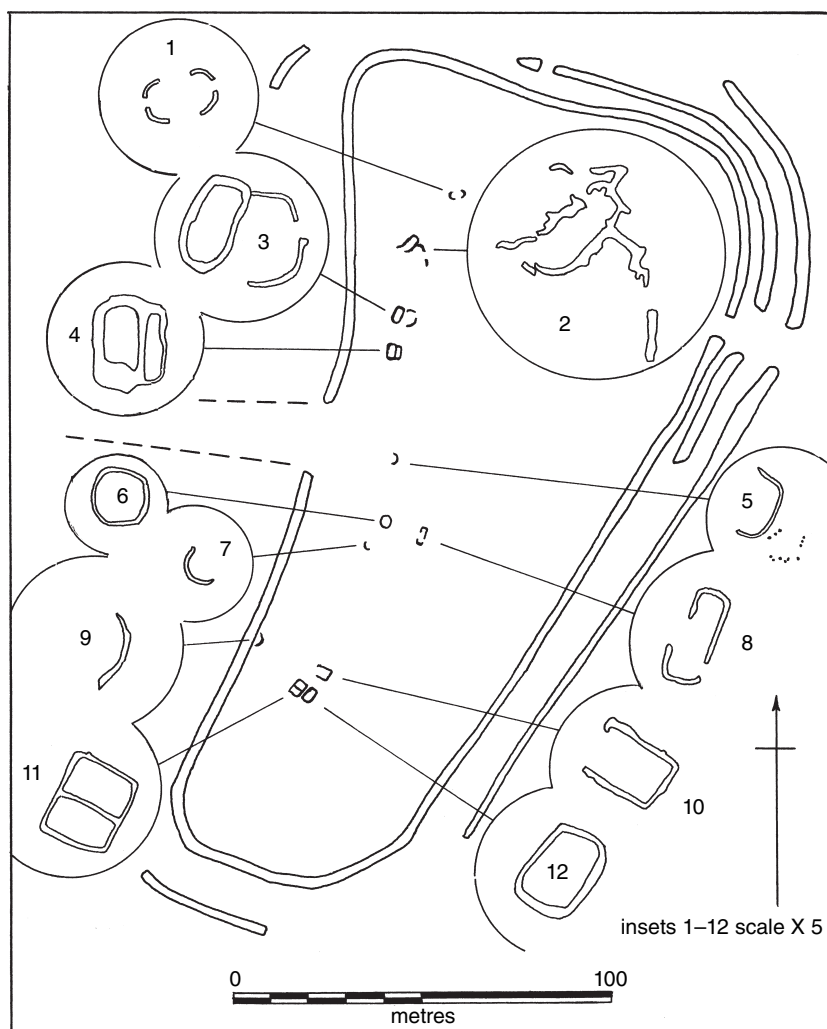
We have already remarked that the archaeologist's perception of burial is necessarily focused on the final stage of the funerary process, in contrast to the anthropologist's viewpoint, which is concerned much more with the rituals by which societies address death and the impact which death makes upon the living. In some societies there evidently was thought to be an intermediate or limbo stage between death and the final entry of the deceased into the other-world, a stage corresponding to the process of decomposition of the body. In terms of the funerary process, this may be reflected in transitional curation of the dead in some way, perhaps by exposure in mortuary houses or by temporary inhumation, until such time as it is deemed appropriate permanently to dispose of the residual remains. In some societies the dead in this limbo phase may pose a threat to the living that may need to be appeased before the spirit takes its place among ancestors in a more benign capacity. A protracted funerary process involving exposure or interim curation of the dead might well account for the fact that excavated burials are not always complete or appear selectively to be missing certain skeletal parts.

Archaeological evidence for funerary rites other than the final act of deposition is more equivocal, being based largely upon structures uncovered in proximity to graves, the interpretation of which is generally more speculative. For the earlier Iron Age, Brewster's extensive salvage excavations at Garton Slack identified two rectangular enclosures that he interpreted as the focus of ritual activities related to the adjacent funerary monuments (Brewster, 1975: 114–15). In the ditch of one were several headless chalk figurines, including one depicted wearing a belt and sword, while ox burials were found immediately east and west of the enclosure. Just north of this enclosure was a group of semi-circular ring-groove structures, apparently open on the south facing the enclosure, that the excavator was persuaded were not just abraded ring-groove houses. The second enclosure had similar structures to the north and two human burials in its ditch. Neither enclosure had an entrance, and the contents

of pits within them could qualify as structured deposits rather than domestic debris. In both cases these enclosures were in proximity to single square-ditched barrows, but were not otherwise close to either the larger square-ditched barrow group or the small groups of simple inhumations. Whatever function these enclosures may have served in the funerary ritual, however, it appeared that the chariot burials at Garton and Wetwang had their own circular mortuary houses in close proximity (*ibid.* 113).

More recently a pair of contiguous rectilinear enclosures at Sewerby Cottage Farm, Bridlington, Yorkshire (Fenton-Thomas, 2009, structure groups 4 and 5), were interpreted as a mortuary enclosure and square-ditched barrow for the subsequent interment. The larger mortuary enclosure was defined by a much slighter trench that served as a foundation for a hurdle fence, which was apparently removed at the time of the construction of the barrow enclosure. Archaeologically nothing survived of internal structures, so any laying-out platform was evidently not earth-fast. The absence of any structural or artefactual evidence for the function of the mortuary enclosure plainly leaves its interpretation provisional, but similar features at Nosterfield Quarry near Thornborough (Dickson and Hopkinson, 2011) also included in proximity to a square-ditched barrow an enclosure defined by a trench in which there was some evidence for fence posts that had subsequently been removed. The interpretation of this enclosure as serving a ritual purpose is perhaps enhanced by the presence close by of a multiple animal burial, of three horses and a mule. Elsewhere, in the absence of formal cemeteries, it is plainly problematic to identify buildings that were used for funerary purposes, since identification is largely dependent on physical proximity to a burial ground rather than on structural evidence or material associations. Even then, the evidence can be equivocal, as in the case of the revetted drystone structure at Harlyn Bay in Cornwall (Whimster, 1977b), which in the light of subsequent discoveries was more probably a local form of Bronze Age house (Jones, 2008).

If funerary practices in Iron Age Britain involved excarnation, laying out in mortuary enclosures, and temporary inhumation, it would surely have been essential to have a secure location where access could be controlled and the remains of the dead protected from violation. The most obvious location for such an important communal function is a hillfort (Harding, 2012), for too long seen only as defensive citadels rather than fulfilling a range of community functions, social, economic, and ritual. With such multi-functional sites, identifying the particular structures or areas in which funerary activities may have taken place will necessarily prove problematic, not least because so few have been stripped extensively internally. The ‘marsh-fort’ at Sutton Common (van de Noort et al., 2007), hardly a hillfort in the conventional sense, may offer a unique insight into the role of enclosed sites in funerary practices. Its location on the edge of the Humber wetlands has resulted in excellent preservation of timbers, and the scale of excavation of the interior of the major



**Fig. 2.1** Sutton Common, Yorkshire, marsh-fort with mortuary enclosures. Drawing adapted from van de Noort et al., 2007.

enclosure allowed the prospect that its function might be clarified by more than selective sampling. For the purposes of the present discussion, it is the second phase of use of the site, around 400 BC to 200 BC but post-dating the phase that was dominated by four-posters, that is especially informative. Extending down the west side of the main enclosure in this phase was a series of a dozen small ditched enclosures (Fig. 2.1), ranging from around 3 to 6 metres across, sub-circular or sub-rectangular in outline, and including examples with central division, the purpose of which was unclear. There was

no evidence of pits for burials, nor remnants of human bone or cremated remains within the enclosures to support the idea of burials at ground level that had subsequently been scattered by ploughing. But there were some fragments of burnt animal bone in the ditches and from the vicinity of the enclosures. The excavators therefore tentatively proposed that these small compounds had been mortuary enclosures for funerary rites involving cremation and disposal elsewhere. The evidence was admittedly tenuous, and the fact that the burnt remains were almost entirely animal might argue for some propitiatory rites not involving human burial. But it is hard to avoid the conclusion that these structures were related in some way to ritual activities on a communal scale. What is also abundantly clear is that any such interpretation would have been unsustainable on the basis of small-scale selective excavation.

With the widespread adoption of cremation in south-eastern England in the later pre-Roman Iron Age, the identification of mortuary enclosures and pyre sites in proximity to cemeteries becomes a realistic possibility. Among cemeteries excavated to modern standards one of the earliest in date is Westhampnett (Fig. 2.2; Fitzpatrick, 1997), around 3 kilometres east of the Chichester dykes, but not demonstrably part of a contemporary landscape focused on that complex. On the basis of the archaeological evidence, Fitzpatrick (*ibid.* 241) was able to propose a reasoned series of stages, from 'biological death' and the laying out of the body, through a 'transitional' phase when the cremation took place, to an 'incorporation' phase in which the dead person was putatively admitted to the community of ancestors, the last 'liminal period' being one that may have taken several years. This interpretation was based on the cemetery's associated structures, notably four small, sub-rectangular, ditched enclosures, which may have served as shrines, and a series of features distinguished by T-, X-, or Y-shaped scoops that were interpreted as the sites of pyres. From associated artefacts, notably pottery and brooches, the time-span for the use of the complex was estimated at no more than sixty years, from around 100 to 40 BC. The fact that only a very few graves intersect and that there is only marginal intrusion of the spread of burials on the cemetery's south-eastern perimeter into the area of pyres endorses the conclusion that the Iron Age complex had a limited lifespan.

Three of the four sub-rectangular 'shrine' enclosures were aligned north-west/south-east, with the fourth offset to the north, and a further enclosure, containing a cremation burial and with postholes in each corner, forming an extension to the south-easterly alignment. Two of the four simple enclosures appear to have had entrance gaps in their ditches. Because of truncation it is unclear whether the upcast from the ditches was piled internally or externally, though the latter seems more likely if the limited space within was meant to be utilized. In the case of the burial enclosure any upcast piled within would have covered the cremation deposit and encroached on the upright posts, though this need not have impeded their function as totems or structural supports.

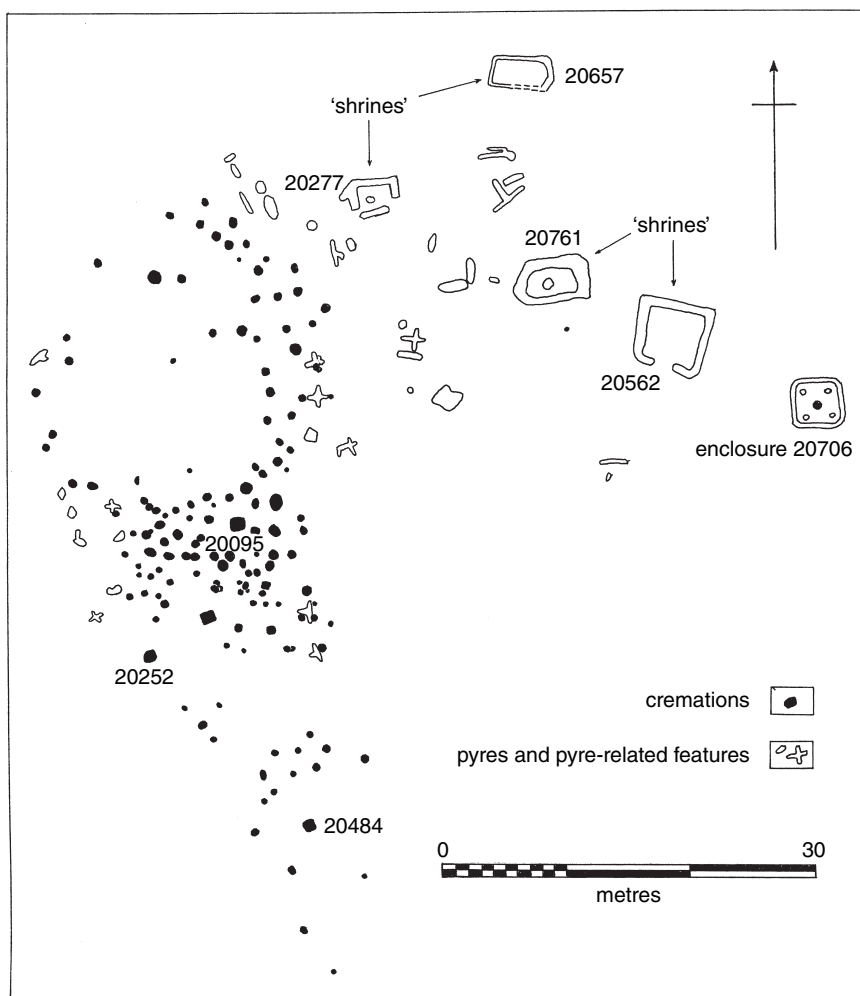


Fig. 2.2 Westhampnett, Sussex, cemetery plan. Drawing adapted from Fitzpatrick, 1997.

The ritual purpose of the 'shrines', like comparable examples from sites such as Danebury, was not proclaimed by any associated votive deposits, though their ditches all contained burnt human fragments and pyre debris and in two instances there were similar deposits in scoops within the enclosures. The excavator suggested that they may have housed venerated images and been intended for limited access only (*ibid.* 231).

Eleven convincing pyre sites were recorded (Fig. 2.3), the most distinctive feature of which were their T-, X-, or Y-shaped basal trenches, which were interpreted as ventilation channels designed to promote the firing of the pyre. There was relatively little evidence of *in situ* burning, but experimental replication suggested that this may not have penetrated far into subsoil, and

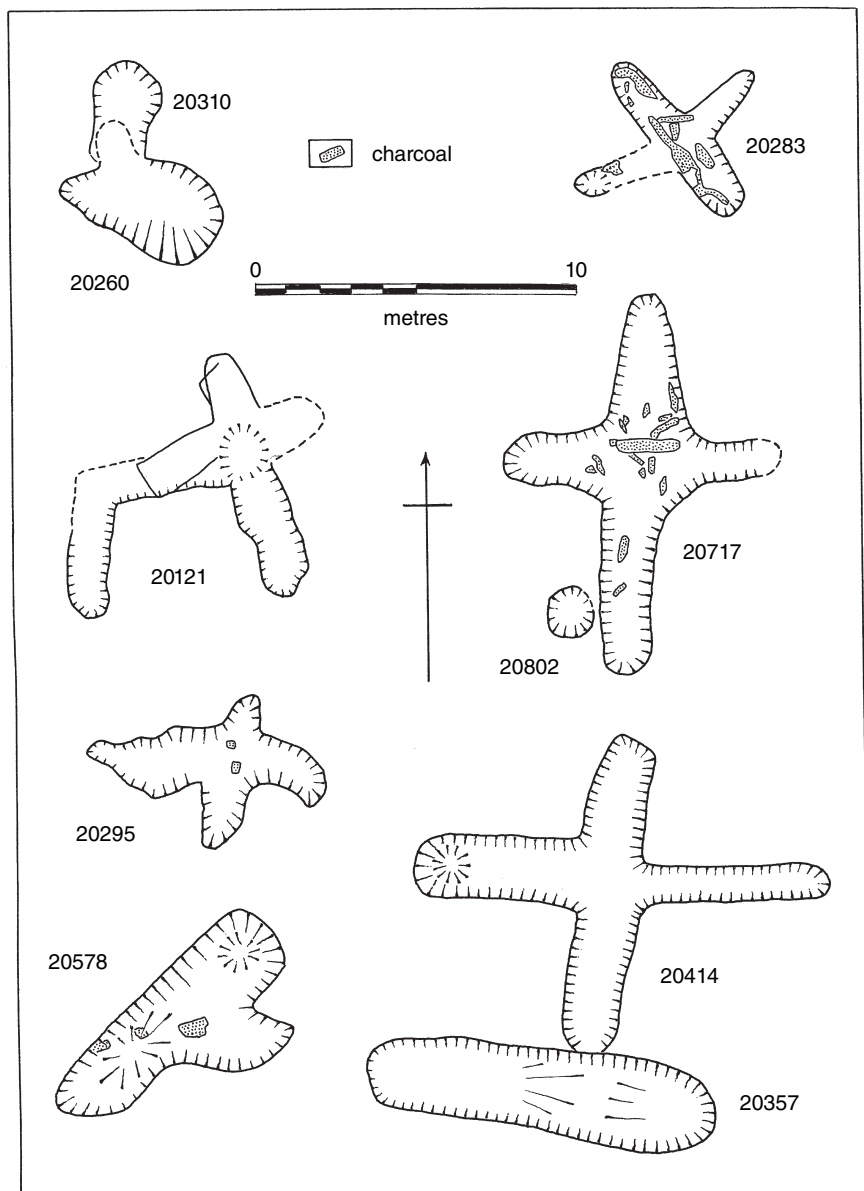


Fig. 2.3 Westhampnett, Sussex, cemetery pyre sites. Drawing adapted from Fitzpatrick, 1997.

that truncation of upper levels of the site may have destroyed any surviving evidence. The filling of these features nevertheless, including charcoal, cremated human remains, and other burnt debris from the pyre, afforded convincing evidence of the structures' purpose. Iron nails were recovered

from the pyre sites, suggesting either the re-use of structural timber, perhaps from the home of the deceased, or some elaboration of the pyre structure itself.

Ancillary features were also found at Biddenham Loop, Bedfordshire (Luke, 2008), adjacent to the late pre-Roman Iron Age cemetery. A rectangular pit containing charcoal, burnt stones, and cremated human bone, but without surviving evidence of *in situ* burning or any fragments of flues, was described for that reason as a 'pyre-related' structure, but clearly it was a product of the funerary process. Furthermore, a setting of postholes forming a 3 m square within a square-ditched enclosure was compared to similar structures from Westthampnett and interpreted as a possible shrine. A range of pyre-related evidence was reportedly discovered at Elms Farm, Heybridge, Essex, but only two actual cremation graves were found. A variation on standard funerary practice was observed in the Latton Lands, Wiltshire, burials (Powell et al., 2009), where the remains in grave 1095 were apparently cremated *in situ*, rather than the residue of cremation on a separate pyre. This practice has also been recorded at Puddlehill in Bedfordshire (Matthews, 1976: 168–9) where cremation 8 was in a silted up pit and cremation 7 was within an elongated pit excavated in the filling of an earlier Iron Age ditch. As Whimster (1981: 154) observed, the use of a separate pyre enabled the burial itself to be contained within a smaller grave pit, so that one may infer that *in situ* cremation and burial in combination was adopted in circumstances other than in formal cemeteries, when the location was particularly significant or there were no spatial constraints.

Rather more evidence has been adduced from major late Iron Age or early Roman sites at Folly Lane, Verulamium (Niblett, 1999), and at Stanway, Colchester (Crummy et al., 2007). Several high-status burial sites of the late pre-Roman Iron Age or early Roman period in continental Europe have likewise yielded significant traces of funerary activity in and around the area of burial enclosures. The scale and complexity of these sites, however, suggests that we are dealing with special ritual centres that may not be representative, even of elite burial in the late pre-Roman Iron Age. Nevertheless, Stanway and other contemporary sites are certainly more informative than conventional cemeteries in regard to funerary practice. Crummy was able to distinguish within the funerary compounds between cremation burials, subterranean mortuary chambers, mortuary enclosures, and the sites of pyres and pits in which pyre debris and cremation residues were deposited (Fig. 2.4). The exact function of each of these and their role in the funerary ritual is not always self-evident, and the purpose of the chambers and mortuary enclosures in particular seems equivocal. The chambers (Fig. 2.5) contained quantities of broken pottery, pyre debris, and in most instances some cremated bone, but they were not seemingly burial sites themselves, and one such chamber contained no cremated remains. Their purpose therefore seems more probably to have been to contain the dead whilst arrangements were in preparation for cremation, after which the bulk of the remains were deposited elsewhere. The

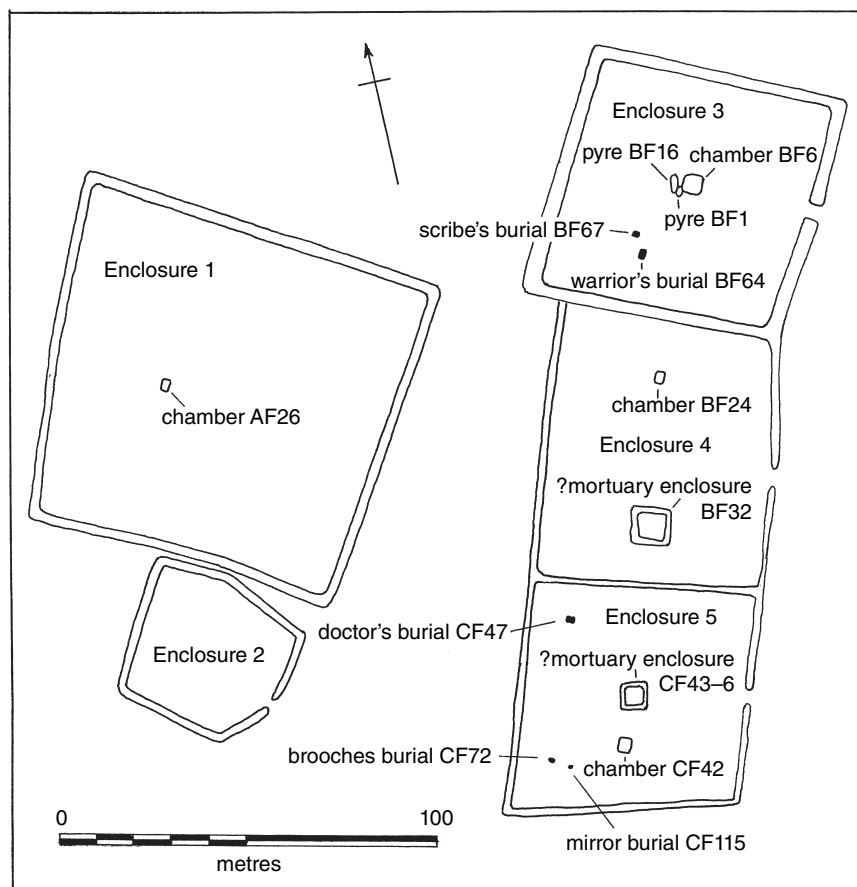


Fig. 2.4 Stanway, Colchester, Essex, site plan. Drawing adapted from Crummy et al., 2007.

function of the small, rectilinear mortuary enclosures has equally been subject to debate. Quantities of burnt material, and in one case scorching of the subsoil, suggested the possibility that these were sites of pyres. Settings of postholes in this interpretation could have supported the pyre structure. In one instance, however, there was no evidence of burning, and it seems more likely that the timber framework was to support a structure on which the dead could be laid out prior to cremation for mourners and attendants to pay their respects. There is no reason to demand uniformity of practice on every occasion, of course, since the ceremony will doubtless have varied according to status or circumstances of the deceased, so that the exposure platform could if required have become the site of the pyre itself.

A major problem with using this evidence for retro-inference regarding earlier Iron Age practices is, of course, that for inhumation burial some of the stages will necessarily have been different. Furthermore, current opinion



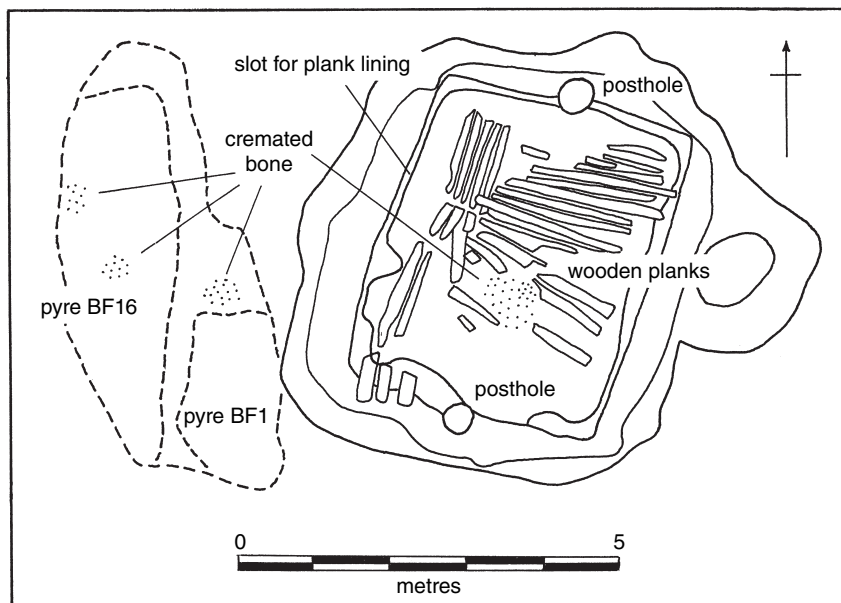


Fig. 2.5 Stanway, Colchester, Essex, chamber BF6 and pyre site. Drawing adapted from Crummy et al., 2007.

favours the idea that there may have been fundamental changes in Iron Age society in the century before the Roman conquest, so that evidence derived from sites like Stanway at Colchester may not be representative at all of practices that prevailed in earlier centuries.

### INDIVIDUAL, MULTIPLE, SEQUENTIAL?

In principle more elaborate tombs could have been re-used over several generations in a sequence of episodes of interment that archaeologically should be distinguishable in much the same way that successive episodes of building or occupation are distinguishable on settlement sites. Where the grave was covered by a mound of earth or rubble this may be evident from vertical stratigraphy, though secondary activity may be less obvious if the burial included a chamber of timber or stone with provision for subsequent access, in which case the only evidence may be the displacement or disturbance of earlier interments. In more straightforward cases, like many of the Yorkshire square-ditched barrows, where just one grave is surrounded by the ditch, we might assume that the ditch and the low mound built over the grave from its upcast were constructed immediately after the interment, in the absence of any reason or evidence for an

intervening lapse of time. But where more than one grave is cut into the primary ground surface, as in the case of some Hallstatt barrow burials in continental Europe, the question arises whether all died simultaneously, or whether some were curated until the construction of the mound when a final act of closure was undertaken. Even then, there are numerous examples in Hallstatt cemeteries where secondary burials were dug into the body of the mound, resulting in Olivier's (2000) *sépultures adventices*. Where the burial mound is of less than monumental proportions and is vulnerable to destruction by ploughing, these secondary burials will not have survived, which could account for a proportion of the 'elusive dead' of the British Iron Age. In the case of the Yorkshire cemeteries, the barrow ditch itself was deemed an appropriate location for secondary burial, particularly for infants, but also for adults on occasion.

Where several burials are cut into the primary ground level below a barrow mound, archaeologists tend to accord priority to one burial, most obviously a centrally located burial, as the primary interment, and to regard the others in some respect as subordinate or dependent burials. The rationale behind this inference is not always particularly obvious, but in the case of the Magdalenenberg in Baden-Württemberg (Spindler, 1976) the radial disposition of the satellite burials around the robbed central grave certainly suggests a dependent relationship of the former upon the latter, whilst at the Hohmichele (Riek, 1962) the remnants of the robbed central grave endorse its probable primacy, though this is in some measure compromised by the elaboration of grave VI. The interpretation of the Hohmichele group is further complicated by the fact that both inhumation and cremation are separately represented, and by the fact that some stratigraphic intersection between graves is apparent. Generally inhumation progressively supersedes cremation in the Hallstatt Iron Age, but there is some evidence of 'bi-ritual' burial, involving a subordinate cremation at head or foot of an inhumation, particularly in secondary burials.

Double or multiple burials in one grave are certainly known among Hallstatt-period cemeteries, including at Hallstatt itself where the phenomenon was recognized by the nineteenth-century excavators (von Sacken, 1868: 8). At the Magdalenenberg multiple burials include double adult inhumations and adult-child combinations that are generally assumed to represent family groups, though the question how they come to be interred in the same grave remains an issue. Where there is no evidence of subsequent intrusion, are we to assume that these represent coincident deaths, was one body curated in order to be buried together with his or her partner, or might this be evidence for some form of sacrifice or self-sacrifice as alluded to by Caesar? Were the 'husband' and 'wife' in Hohmichele grave VI buried at the same time, or did the chamber remain accessible to permit successive deposition? These questions all point to the probability that monumental Iron Age burial mounds from continental Europe reached completion only after a protracted history of funerary activity. What signalled the final act of closure is plainly unknowable.

Multiple burials in the British Iron Age are comparatively rare, and pose the same problems of interpretation. The massive cist-burial at Lochend, Dunbar, for example, contained the remains of twenty-one individuals, though the skeletal remains were disarticulated and very confused. The excavators therefore speculated whether the grave represented a single episode of multiple burial of bodies in an advanced state of decay, or the result of successive burials over a prolonged period of time (Longworth, 1966). The latter was the preferred solution, the smaller end capstones being regarded as the means of secondary access, and the distribution of displaced bones being apparently consistent with this interpretation. The unusual size and depth of the cist, on the other hand, would appear to be designed for multiple interments, and the internal stratigraphy showed no evidence of a succession of deposits, so that a collective re-interment of bodies that had been previously interred or exposed to excarnation would be an alternative possibility. A programme of radiocarbon dating might now resolve the issue, and help to determine the date of the grave, which, on the basis of fragments of penannular brooches, was assigned to the later first millennium BC or early first millennium AD.

Double burials are known outside formal cemeteries, and sometimes comprise an adult, often female, and a child that had evidently survived infancy. Pit 5001 at Watchfield, Oxfordshire (Birbeck, 2001), is a case in point, the crouched inhumations of a young adult woman and child of around 7–9 years of age being plausibly regarded as mother and child. Not dissimilar is the pairing of an adult female with 2–3-year-old child in the entrance terminal ditch of the Big Ring at Cassington, Oxfordshire (Case, 1982), in a context that could have had ‘liminal’ significance. The disarticulation of the adult skull in this instance may have resulted from a violent death.

#### FACTORS OF SURVIVAL AND ‘GRAVES’ WITHOUT EVIDENCE OF BURIALS

The degree of survival of burial evidence depends upon a number of factors, some environmental, some resulting from subsequent land use, and some consequent upon the way in which Iron Age communities deposited their dead. Graves covered by a substantial barrow mound of earth or stone are inherently more likely to retain their contents intact than those with minimal surface cover, but equally they are more conspicuous to potential tomb robbers. Most surviving burials were placed in a grave pit that penetrated subsoil, but some were simply placed upon the ground, with a low mound of earth or stone piled on them. Both may be vulnerable to destruction by agricultural activity over the centuries, and this could certainly explain some ‘barrow’ ditches, including some of the Yorkshire square-ditched series, that seemingly have no surviving grave.

More commonly the poor survival of bone in acid soils results in the lack of surviving remains beyond residual stains. At Adanac Park, Southampton (Leivers and Gibson, 2011), as we shall see, the identification of the graves in the absence of surviving skeletal remains was endorsed by the presence in one of a convincing 'warrior' assemblage. But there can be few more striking instances of 'phantom burials' than those recorded in some numbers surrounding the principal rectilinear enclosure at Fison Way, Thetford (Gregory, 1992), either within circular ring-ditches, or within rectilinear enclosures or simply in unenclosed flat graves (Fig. 2.6). No skeletal remains survived from

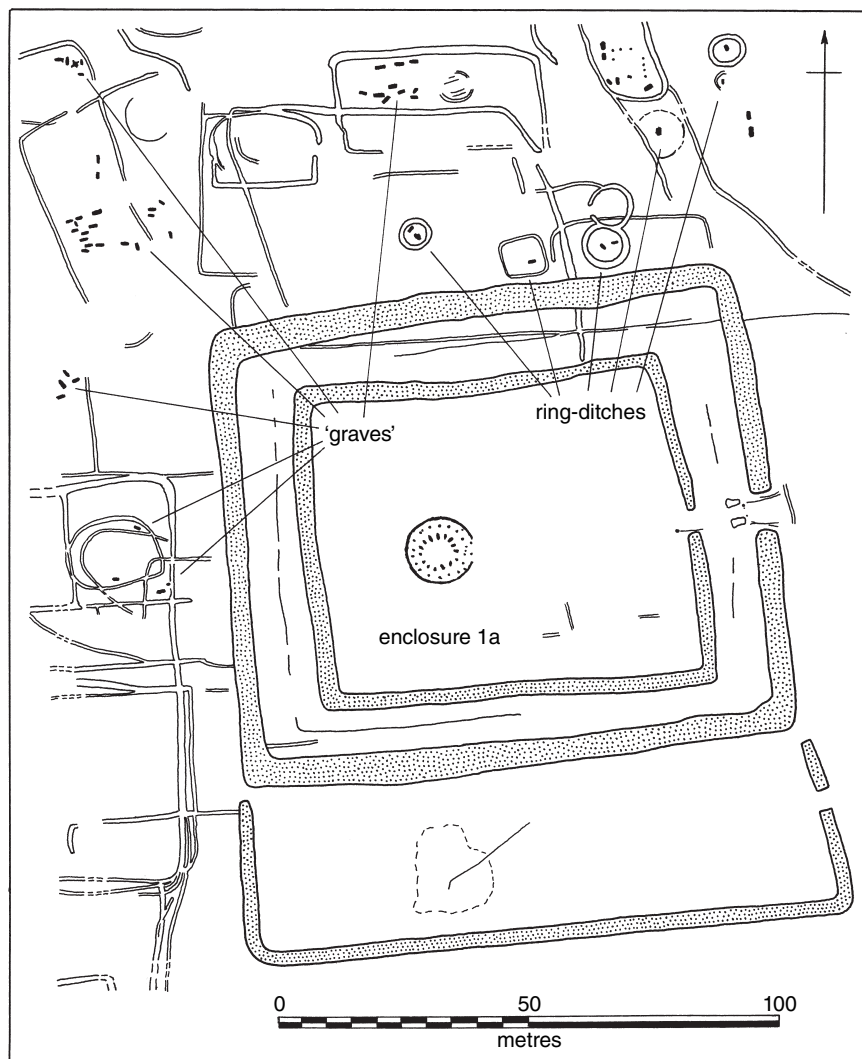


Fig. 2.6 Fison Way, Thetford, Norfolk, site plan. Drawing adapted from Gregory, 1992.

any of these burials, not even a stain to indicate the position of the inhumations, though enhanced phosphate levels were detected in the bottom of some of the grave-like pits. None included any dedicated grave-goods, though some apparently associated finds and stratigraphic relationships indicated that the burials most probably belonged to phase II of the site sequence, spanning the first century BC and earlier first century AD. The distribution of 'graves' shows a tendency to cluster in groups of half a dozen to a maximum of twenty, not unlike many of the more recently discovered burial grounds of southern Britain, and though direct association with the smaller, rectilinear enclosures could not be demonstrated positively, there seems to be a strong likelihood that some were enclosed within group compounds. Posthole structures within some enclosures may have been part of the funerary process. In a number of respects Fison Way appears to have been rather more than a regular domestic and agricultural settlement, and the case for believing that these were graves, even in the absence of definitive remains, seems compelling.

At the opposite end of the survival spectrum, of course, are bog bodies, in which skin and hair may survive. But there can be no more striking instance of survival of soft tissue than the brain material within the skull, dating from the sixth century BC, found on the Iron Age site at Heslington in York in a pit within the settlement complex.

## TREATMENT OF NEONATES AND INFANTS

The current orthodoxy regarding the treatment of neonates and infants in the European Iron Age is that 'infant burials are largely absent from regular cemeteries, while infant skeletons frequently appear in settlement contexts' (Karl and Löcker, 2011: 37). The presence of infant burials in settlements is widely represented in Britain and continental Europe, notably at the Ramsautal at the Dürrenberg bei Hallein, where eleven neonates or infants, represented by complete or fragmentary skeletons up to three months of age, were found in close proximity to occupied buildings, by their entrances, in their drainage gullies, or beneath their floors. Dating could be assigned to a span from La Tène B1 to La Tène C. A key factor at the Ramsautal was that there was no evidence of pits having been cut into the house floors, so that the burials must have been deposited at the time that the buildings were constructed, in effect that they were foundation burials. Karl and Löcker discount the suggestion that they were foundation sacrifices, so we must assume that the remains were curated between death and deposition. Instances such as these, however, represent special rites involving infant burials, rather than an alternative form of burial for infants.

The British Iron Age evidence would endorse this distinction. In the square-ditched barrow cemeteries of eastern Yorkshire children and infants were generally under-represented, unless with an adult. They were, however, found in barrow ditches, notably at Garton Slack, where in barrow 4 of a group that also included a mirror burial, no less than ten infants were buried in the surrounding ditch, each in its own rectangular or circular grave. Brewster (1980: 39) stressed that infants were never buried at Garton or Wetwang *within* the ditched enclosure, suggesting that this was because they had not achieved the status of adult members of the community. Stead's excavations in the Rudston cemeteries broadly corroborated this conclusion; he concluded that children and infants were either buried elsewhere in a separate ritual, or perhaps superficially within the barrow mounds, where they will seldom have survived. The segregated burial ground at Garton Slack area 10, however, suggests that there may on occasion have been special provision for infants.

Elsewhere in southern England neonates' and children's burials are widely recorded, notably at Gussage All Saints, Dorset (Wainwright, 1979), Gravelly Guy, Oxfordshire (Lambrick and Allen, 2004), and Suddern Farm, Middle Wallop, Hampshire (Cunliffe and Poole, 2000b). Our interpretation of the Wessex evidence, however, is obviously compromised by the absence of extensive 'regular' cemeteries of the kind found in eastern Yorkshire to provide a contrast with the settlement evidence.

## EXCARNATION

It has become fashionable in recent years to suggest that instead of a regular burial rite Iron Age communities practised excarnation. Excarnation is not generally a rite of disposal. It is a practice that may have been adopted as part of the overall funerary process, but there is no evidence that the dead were left on excarnation platforms indefinitely, or for collapsed structures and accumulations of skeletal debris, albeit ravaged by predators, that might have been expected as a consequence. The assumption must therefore be that, once the body had been defleshed and dried, the skeletal remnants would have been removed for disposal elsewhere. Of course inhumation need not be a final act of disposal either, since in some societies the dead are buried for an initial period of time, during which the equivalent process of decomposition took place, then exhumed before final deposition. Interim burial necessarily will be hard to detect archaeologically, since by definition if we detect inhumed remains, it was *de facto* final, even if not originally intended to be. Whether exposed for excarnation or subject to temporary burial, the remaining bones in a disarticulated form may have been distributed or disposed of in ways that are more difficult to detect archaeologically than a conventional grave.

Given the widespread incidence of individual human bones or skeletal parts on settlement sites, it seems likely that excarnation was widely practised in the British Iron Age (Carr and Knüsel, 1997). The dead would have been exposed on platforms, perhaps within small fenced areas to prevent predators dragging off parts of the corpse wholesale. Such structures need not have been elaborate, and archaeologically could conform to the same patterns of earth-fast posts that are generally, and doubtless correctly, interpreted as upstanding granaries. It seems likely in the interests of security and to avoid desecration that such sites would have been located where access could be controlled, most obviously within hillforts, where hillforts were part of the Iron Age landscape. The Danebury 'shrines' could have been such structures, but so equally could others among the many four-poster structures from that site, though the apparent absence of residual fragments or small bones argues in favour of the conventional interpretation of their use for storage (Tracey, 2013).

Madgwick (2008) has raised doubts about the widespread practice of excarnation in the British Iron Age, based on an assessment of weathering patterns on human and animal bone from Winnall Down and Danebury though Tracey (2013: 172) challenged the validity of Madgwick's comparative data. The fact that the human bones were less modified as a result of exposure than the animal remains would still support the conclusion that excarnation was practised, but in a controlled and enclosed environment, rather than exposed to weather or to avian predators. The fact that the human remains found in pits, at Danebury, for instance, account for a very small proportion of the estimated population of the hillfort or of its users over the length of its occupation is immaterial, unless we imagine that these represent the totality of those that were accorded this treatment. Assuming, as seems more probable, that the surviving skeletons or partial remains were either special ritual deposits, or the remains of temporary inhumations that, for one reason or another, were not subsequently disinterred for disposal, then the proportion of the population that was dealt with in this fashion is incalculable. It seems worth re-affirming, however, that excarnation in a closed environment is by no means incompatible with the evidence for four-post structures, which as granaries would certainly have been closed and secure from scavengers, and therefore as excarnation houses could presumably have been equally effective. Particular care evidently needs to be taken to ensure the retrieval of any human remains found in close proximity to such structures, and the recognition of their potential significance.

## OSTEOLOGY

Until relatively recently, osteological examination of human remains from archaeological excavations was primarily targeted at establishing age and sex

of the deceased, with the results generally being relegated to an appendix in the published report that was largely ignored in the overall synthesis of the site (Larsson, 2009: 109). This was certainly true a couple of generations ago, partly because excavation strategies seldom included from the outset an environmental dimension, relying instead on ad hoc arrangements for post-excavation analysis as the outcome of fieldwork required, and partly because osteological science was not then capable of addressing the spectrum of questions that it can today. The opportunity to study community groups as a whole or even on a regional scale is clearly dependent upon the existence of a body of evidence, adequately preserved, such as is only available in the British Iron Age in those limited areas where there are extensive formal cemeteries. Among these the cemeteries of eastern Yorkshire have been subject to several studies in recent years, as has the material from the Durotrigan zone of southern Dorset.

Nowadays, in addition to establishing age and sex, and possible cause of death, osteological examination can potentially inform us about physical trauma, whether resulting from accidental or deliberate violence, and hence, provided that a large enough dataset is available, to estimate the level of violence in Iron Age society. It may inform us regarding conditions such as arthritis or joint disease as a potential indicator of the degree of stress and workload experienced by working communities, and the kinds of infections and diseases to which they were prone. Perhaps more crucially, it may now inform us through stable isotope analysis about nutrition and diet, as exemplified by Redfern's (2008a) analyses of Durotrigan dietary habits between the Iron Age and Roman periods. Of course the validity of inferences drawn for the population at large will depend upon the degree of selectivity in the cemetery population, but osteological analyses may also contribute to that assessment.

An important additional contribution of osteological studies, however, is illustrated by Redfern's (2008b) re-examination of bones from Gussage All Saints and from the 1985–6 investigations at Maiden Castle, Dorset, which revealed not only evidence of peri-mortem trauma but also taphonomic indicators that provided vital clues to the treatment of bodies after death. This casts light on one particular form of disposal, which appears to have been reserved for adult males who had suffered blunt-force cranial injuries, either as the cause of death or as part of the subsequent process of disarticulation, prior to secondary burial in structured deposits. A complex funerary ritual seemingly

consisted of excarnation/exposure or shallow burial during which the body could be accessed by canids, followed by the dismemberment and processing of the body in order to extract portions of cranial and long bone material.

(*ibid.* 296)



This treatment of one very limited section of society underlines not just the diversity of funerary practice but the fact that its purpose may well have been to serve other community rituals than simple disposal.

Routine osteological examination of a sizeable sample like the cemeteries of eastern Yorkshire can provide a wealth of information about the lifestyle of the local population, or at least of that section of it that was accorded formal burial. At Wetwang Slack more than a fifth of the adult population had suffered routine injuries (King, 2010), mainly fractures of hands, feet, arms, and legs, as a result of accidents that would be consistent with domestic and agricultural labour, a pattern that is broadly replicated elsewhere in the region (Giles, 2012: 101–3). In the Burton Fleming–Rudston–Kirkburn series of cemeteries Sheelagh Stead (1991: 138) showed that, even allowing for the poor state of vertebral preservation, a significant proportion of the population suffered from osteoarthritis, which seemingly afflicted a greater proportion of women in the 25–35 age bracket than men, a statistic which must reflect the physical strain of domestic or agricultural loads that they were expected to bear. Evidence of violent trauma, whether inflicted in battle, single combat, or local skirmishes with intruders or hostile neighbours, is well attested, though the victims, mainly men, appear to have recovered from their wounds in a number of instances. Giles (2012: 104–7) argued that the instances of violent trauma were at a relatively low level, whilst acknowledging that soft tissue wounds could be fatal without impacting on the skeleton, and that the incidence of skeletal trauma was in some measure a reflection of combat tactics, whether, for example, a sword was used for slashing or thrusting. Nevertheless, King (2010) found a higher incidence of fatal wounding in her Wessex sample, apparently endorsing the evidence adduced for the Durotriges by Redfern (2008b, 2009), but based upon evidence from pit burials rather than burials in cemeteries.

One technique that has come to increasing prominence in the past decade or two is stable isotope analysis of collagen from teeth and bone as a means of determining diet (Jay and Richards, 2007). In continental Europe an analysis of human remains from La Tène cemeteries in Bohemia revealed ‘more positive  $\delta^{15}\text{N}$  values observed in males buried with iron weaponry than the remaining male population’ (Le Huray et al., 2006). This pattern could be accounted for by a differential dietary system in which those with warrior status ate more meat and dairy products than the population at large, perhaps more akin to a Boat Race crew in training than to the ‘champion’s portion’ of documentary sources. Analysis of skeletal remains from a number of sites from south-east Scotland to southern and western England, including the major cemetery at Wetwang Slack (Jay and Richards, 2006; Jay, 2008), was rather less dramatic, suggesting that Iron Age diet across large areas of Britain was broadly similar, being high in animal protein derived from meat and dairy products. On the other hand stable isotope analysis also indicated that marine

resources were under-exploited, even by settlements along the East Lothian plain that were in close proximity to the sea. This evidence can be used to complement more conventional methods of assessing diet, based on surviving faunal remains and palaeo-botanical data. In the case of the Wetwang sites there is an interesting divergence between the cemetery evidence, where only joints of sheep or pig were included in the graves, and the adjacent settlement that it presumably served from which ample evidence of cattle husbandry was recovered. It seems unlikely that cattle were reared solely for milk, hides, and traction (Giles, 2012: 112), though it is possible that beef was reserved for major communal feasts and ceremonial occasions, rather than as a staple of the meat diet. The most obvious explanation, however, is surely that the funerary feast or funerary offerings were made up of foodstuffs that were prescribed by tradition, and that sheep and pig were the traditional meats for the occasion.

One particular application that has a potential relevance to the cemeteries of eastern Yorkshire is the strontium isotope signature in tooth enamel that is established in early childhood, and which might therefore indicate whether any of the individuals buried in the distinctive square-ditched barrow cemeteries had originated outside the region. Evidence showed conclusively that all the individuals examined from Wetwang were born and bred within the region or its margins (Montgomery et al., 2007), and that the cemetery reflects a remarkably stable population with consistent dietary habits. This in itself need hardly occasion surprise, since, even if a measure of settlement from abroad was responsible for the introduction of this distinctive burial rite into eastern Yorkshire—and other explanations are equally possible (Anthoens, 2007, 2010a, b, c)—it would only be detectable from the earliest burials, possibly of a relatively small number of influential individuals, and dating from the later fifth or early fourth centuries, rather than from the cumulatively larger subsequent cemeteries. This is doubtless where DNA sampling could be of value, subject to limitations of older excavated material and of the research technology.

## RE-USE OF OLDER SITES

It has been suggested earlier that some of the ‘elusive’ dead might be accounted for by interments in older cemeteries that have not been recognized archaeologically in the absence of diagnostic associations. We have already cited the possible example of the burial at High Knowes, Alnham (Jobey and Tait, 1966), containing a cast bronze pin of distinctive Irish type. Rather than being an Iron Age burial within a Bronze Age cairnfield, it has been suggested more recently (Oswald et al., 2006: 41) that the pin was a later insertion into an older burial, though this rather improbable explanation still implies an ongoing veneration of a much older funerary site. The detection of cord rig

agriculture, and the possibility that some of the cairns and ring-ditches may have been clearance cairns and houses, however, suggests a more complex pattern of remains than was formerly supposed. An even older association is represented by the four extended inhumations on the east side of the henge enclosure at Cairpapple, West Lothian, that Piggott (1948) assigned to his Phase V of that site's sequence, dating them provisionally to the early Roman Iron Age. A later reappraisal (Barclay, 1999) favoured an early Christian date, but the principle of (later) Iron Age re-use of a much earlier ritual and funerary monument remains the same.

In East Lothian, the Iron Age burials at Dryburn Bridge (Triscott, 1982; Dunwell, 2007) appear to have respected two earlier Bronze Age burials. More recently, two excavations have shown conclusively that third millennium mortuary sites were consciously re-used for burials in the Iron Age. At Eweford West (Lelong and MacGregor, 2007), a fourth millennium mortuary site, there was a question whether the burial was an Iron Age cist or an older cist re-used, but the contents, comprising pyre remains and cremated bone of an adult and child, mainly fragments of cranium and femur, were radiocarbon dated to 760–390 BC (SUERC-5287), though fragments of chert, flint, and abraded Beaker sherds were evidently residual from earlier activity. Likewise on an older mortuary site at Pencraig Hill the cist contained charcoal, burnt cereal, and burnt and unburnt human bone dated to 170 BC–AD 30 (SUERC-7665). Accompanying the deposit were two hammerstones and a possible amulet of ironstone, characteristically undiagnostic artefacts of the pre-Roman Iron Age assemblage in these parts. Innes was nevertheless impressed by the implications of this awareness and conscious re-use of the earlier Bronze Age burial grounds through the early and later pre-Roman Iron Age:

This in turn suggests that strong oral traditions recounting factual or mythical histories had survived over millennia, though they may have changed considerably with the passage of time. Such histories may have been recalled around the domestic hearth, and perhaps the hearth waste or midden deposited in the cists alluded to that context.

(Lorna Innes in Lelong and MacGregor, 2007)

In southern Britain examples of Iron Age burials in proximity to earlier funerary monuments are relatively common. At Mount Farm, Dorchester-on-Thames, Oxfordshire (Lambrick, 2010), the Iron Age burials overlay the much-reduced outline of the earlier ring-ditch, but it was clear that occasional deposits of human bone had been made in the ditch intermittently from the time of its original use, so that it seems probable that the Iron Age community was well aware of the significance of the earlier site. The two complete crouched burials (F105 and F134) therefore were almost certainly deliberately located around its circuit, perpetuating the ring-ditch's original purpose.

Two hillforts that have an interesting relationship with earlier Bronze Age barrows are Battlesbury and its near neighbour Scratchbury, perhaps designed as part of a ritual landscape with Middle Hill, occupied only by a Bronze Age barrow, between them. Colt Hoare (1812: 69) particularly noted that the barrows opened by Cunnington in the south-west corner of the camp were 'untouched and respected' by the construction of its rampart. Furthermore, the 'small ring or bead of stone' recovered by Cunnington (*ibid.* 68) from the smaller of the two barrows beneath the rampart was later identified by Margaret Guido (1978b) as an Iron Age yellow glass bead of her class 8. She established from Cunnington's notes that the double burial with the bead was secondary in a barrow that had a primary cremation in a cist. This shows that the significance of the barrows was fully appreciated in the Iron Age phase of the site's occupation, and actually used for secondary interments. The fact that Cunnington found no burial within the larger barrow could indicate that it was a cenotaph, but perhaps more important is the clear association of the hillfort with funerary activities. Colt Hoare also noted the presence of seven barrows within the rampart circuit at Scratchbury. Their survival again seems to imply that they were respected by the Iron Age builders and occupants of the hillfort, and in particular Colt Hoare noted that barrow no. 7 was conspicuously sited at a point where the rampart appears consciously to enclose it rather than transecting it.

Deliberate re-use of an Early Bronze Age cemetery appears to be demonstrated by the burial within barrow B10 at Bromfield in Shropshire (Hughes, 1994). Located along a linear spread of barrows, of which several have yielded Early Bronze Age radiocarbon dates, was a barrow within which a central burial pit contained an iron bracelet, a bronze pendant, and two fragments of an iron brooch of La Tène 1 type. Of the skeleton itself no trace survived, though chemical analysis indicated its probable former presence. Fragments of textile adhering to both brooch and bracelet were evidently from a garment worn by the deceased. The barrow itself was most likely a bowl barrow, the original grave from which was disturbed by the secondary insertion of the Iron Age burial into what was a larger than average pit. This intrusion was plainly by design, perhaps, as the excavator suggested, 'to legitimise their own authority by reference to the past' (*ibid.* 401). He cited a parallel instance of apparent re-use of earlier ring-ditches for both inhumation and cremation burials of the later pre-Roman Iron Age at Plas Gogerddan near Aberystwyth (Murphy, 1992). Otherwise, Iron Age funerary practices in Wales remain elusive archaeologically. Murphy noted that, apart from occasional re-use of earlier sites, the only record of burials is in or around hillforts.

A comprehensive trawl of the literature would doubtless yield further examples, but these are sufficient to show that the re-use of older funerary sites is a feature of the Iron Age throughout Britain, perhaps significantly in those regions of the north and west where a distinctive Iron Age

mortuary tradition is conspicuously lacking. Brück's (1995) survey of burial evidence for the insular Late Bronze Age, however, highlighted a further issue, that acts of veneration of older funerary sites may involve not simply their re-use for burial of whole bodies, but the deposition of disarticulated or fragmentary remains, as at Down Farm on Cranborne Chase (Barrett et al., 1991: 214), where a number of separate bones or fragments were deposited across a Middle Bronze Age ring-ditch. Both whole burials and partial deposits indicate a positive effort by later communities to retain an association with whatever these earlier funerary sites so powerfully represented.

### GRAVE ROBBING AND DISTURBANCE

In contrast to the apparent veneration of funerary monuments of the past, grave robbing in antiquity is well attested archaeologically in the Iron Age, notably in the *Fürstengräber* of late Hallstatt western central Europe. The central grave at the Hohmichele had been robbed, probably not long after its deposition, as had the central chamber at the Magdalenenberg, whilst the massive structure surrounding the chamber at Hochdorf was plainly built in anticipation of the possibility of disturbance. A question arises as to the motive, whether simply for plunder or whether the violation of the tomb was intended as a more symbolic desecration. It is generally assumed that robbery of valuable grave-goods was a primary motive, and the late Hallstatt *Fürstengräber* certainly contained gold ornaments, vessels, or accessories that would have had a high intrinsic value. But most Iron Age burials do not contain treasure, and many contain only minimal items such as dress-fasteners that would hardly be worth the effort of locating and robbing. In Britain, even the lavishly equipped burials of the late pre-Roman Iron Age in south-eastern England notably do not contain items of intrinsic worth such as gold torcs. If Caesar's observation of Gaulish customs is indicative (*DBG* VI, 17), robbing of collective war booty was regarded as a grievous capital offence, and it is likely that grave-robbing for plunder would have been treated in the same way. In the case of the rich late Hallstatt tombs we have already noted Arnold's (1995) arguments for regarding them as a means of legitimizing the authority of a ruling lineage by making a monumental statement in the landscape. Accordingly, if a power struggle between rival lineages resulted in a change of regime, it is quite possible that the tumuli of the ousted lineage may have been vandalized expressly to underline its loss of authority. Few acts could equal the insult inflicted on and the indignity suffered by the displaced lineage than the desecration of its ancestral tombs.

In the case of the La Tène cemeteries in the Champagne a very high proportion of the graves appears to have been disturbed. Looting of these

sites in modern times was of course not uncommon, but the fact that particular parts of the grave in relation to the body were targeted, and that not all the grave-goods were removed, suggested the possibility of the intrusion having taken place in the Iron Age. Tomb robbers may well have been interested in torcs or other items of personal ornamentation, especially had they suspected the possible presence of intrinsically valuable metalwork, but the removal, as opposed to the displacement, of the head and certain limbs on the right-hand side of the body would hardly have been necessary if plunder of portable artefacts was the sole objective. Rozoy (1970) at the Mont Troté confirmed one instance of intrusion not long after the burial, since a later La Tène 1 interment had subsequently been superimposed upon the disturbed remains. At Quilly (Stead et al., 2006) a similar situation pertained, a secondary burial having been deposited over the despoiled remains of the earlier grave, the shape of which indicated that it must have been a chariot burial.

This form of looting or intentional desecration does not appear to have been a widespread phenomenon in the British Iron Age, perhaps because the graves and cemeteries were less conspicuous in the first place or because they were known not to contain anything of intrinsic value. The risk of looting, nevertheless, raises the possibility that valuables dedicated to the dead might have been deposited as part of the funeral process, but in hoards separate from the burial itself.

## VOTIVE DEPOSITION AND HOARDS

The relationship between formal burial and hoards is a matter of current debate, but the issue has long been identified. Eogan noted that in northern Europe the tools and ornaments found in hoards had previously occurred in graves, perhaps suggesting that, rather than being linked to industrial production, the increased number of hoards in the Late Bronze Age may have resulted from a 'ritual practice possibly centred on a cult of the dead—*grave goods so to speak without a grave*' (Eogan, 1964: 285, my italics). This notion was taken up and developed by Bradley (1998), who showed the reciprocal relationship between burials and hoards and their various key contents especially weaponry throughout the Bronze Age of northern and north-western Europe. He further argued that ritual practice had changed from an emphasis on conspicuous consumption of wealth to a practice 'closer to the Roman conception of sacrifice as payment for services rendered' (ibid. xxx), or perhaps, in the case of deposits associated with burial, as payment for services anticipated. The idea of hoards as surrogate burials has been recently re-affirmed in the context of the later Iron Age in Scandinavia by Myrberg, for

whom 'the hoard represents the dead person and constitutes a material obituary' (2009: 141). She also alluded to the tradition of 'Odin's Law', derived from the *Ynglinga Saga*, whereby it was believed that the dead might bring with them to Valhalla both pyre goods and goods previously set aside in hoards. This certainly affords some corroboration of the idea that grave-goods and hoarded goods might serve the deceased in an afterlife.

Terrestrial hoards are not nearly as common in the British Iron Age as they are in the Late Bronze Age, though there is certainly an increase in the number of hoards throughout Britain in the later pre-Roman and into the Roman Iron Age. The pit burials of torcs at Snettisham, Norfolk, certainly anticipated the possibility of looters, implicit in the construction of two-tiered deposits with a false bottom between them, but however we interpret this site, it is highly unusual and hardly indicative of Iron Age practice in Britain generally. But for its minimal residual ashes we might have regarded the Baldock cauldron deposit (Stead and Rigby, 1986) as a hoard. There is also a proliferation of coin hoards in southern and south-eastern England in the late pre-conquest period. These frequently contain very large numbers of coins, and it is possible that they were deposited for a variety of reasons, not necessarily votive or funerary but quite probably in the expectation of subsequent recovery. Water deposits, on the other hand, known throughout the Iron Age, whether in lakes as at Llyn Fawr, in marshy land as at Llyn Cerrig Bach, or in rivers, as in the case of deposition of parade weaponry and armour in the Thames or the river Witham, seem more likely to have been votive dedications. Establishing a direct association with human skeletal remains in a water context is obviously problematic, but at La Tène (Fig. 2.7B) at least two skeletons were incorporated among the debris around the Pont Vouga, together with a concentration of swords and spears (Vouga, 1923). There is a measure of correlation between these river deposits and some more elaborate grave finds. The decorated scabbards from Sutton Reach, and from the Witham in Lincolnshire, for example, have their counterparts in burials at Wetwang Slack, Kirkburn, and Bugthorpe in Yorkshire (Harding, 2007: figs 5.7, 7.2), while the parade shields from the Witham and the Thames, though more elaborate in their bronze construction and ornamental panels, have simpler wooden or leather counterparts in the Yorkshire cemeteries and occasionally elsewhere, where they survive only in residual metal fittings.

The problems in interpreting Iron Age hoards is their diversity, even in northern Britain (Hunter, 1997), so that it would be extremely unlikely that any single explanation would satisfy all circumstances. Whether any of these deposits were linked to burial is impossible to determine, but if we are right to infer that the funerary process could be a complex one involving more than the final act of burial, then it is possible that some dedicatory offerings could have been made elsewhere than in the grave. This is an area of research that undoubtedly requires further attention.

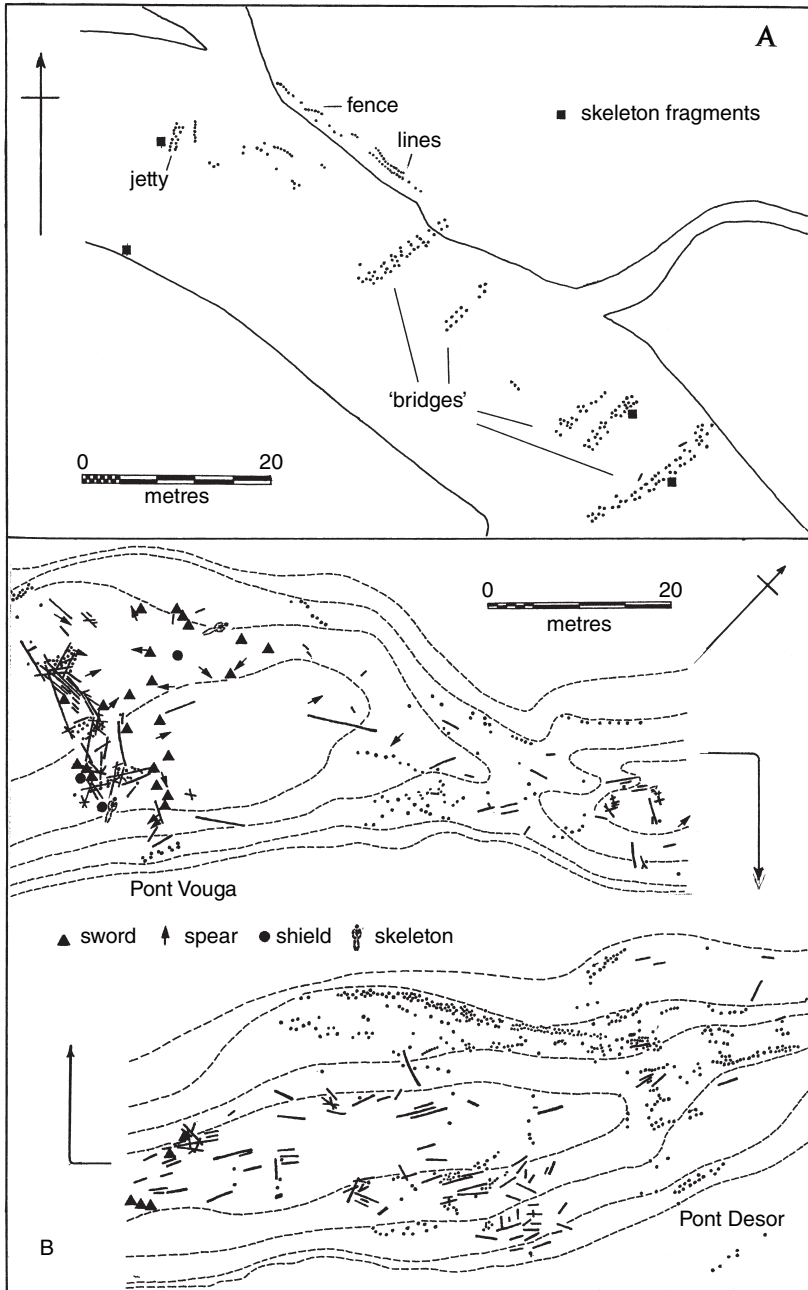


Fig. 2.7 Ritual 'bridges', A, Eton Rowing Lake, Thames, B, La Tène, Switzerland. Drawings adapted from Allen and Hacking, 2000, and from Vouga, 1923.



## CAVES, RIVERS, AND WETLANDS

From the examples of the Sculptor's Cave at Covesea, Moray, and High Pasture Cave on Skye it would appear that caves were places where special ritual activities may have taken place, and these more complex sites will be examined in due course. But it seems likely that caves would have had an attraction as suitable places for burial more generally, and this may account for the Iron Age re-use of cave sites in the Oban district of Argyll (Saville and Hallen, 1994). Unfortunately, most of the discoveries were the result of early investigations, so that records and the remains are largely deficient. But radiocarbon dating of the adult remains from Macarthur Cave leaves no doubt that these burials were Iron Age. The relatively high representation of children among the twelve individuals from Distillery Cave nevertheless raises questions as to whether these too may have been ritual rather than regular deposits. In southern Britain special rituals may account for the complete and fragmentary skeletons and skulls in the Hay Wood Cave at Hutton in Somerset (Everton and Everton, 1972). The seven inhumations, including three children, from the Guy's Rift fissure at Slaughterford in Wiltshire (Hewer, 1926), on the other hand, have the appearance of normal burials. The artefacts from Read's Cavern on the northern edge of the Mendips (Langford, 1921, 1922), including spindle whorls, a late La Tène brooch, and fragments of Glastonbury ware, suggest occupational use of the cave, but the human remains appear to have been largely disarticulated, and their significance is therefore hard to evaluate.

Rivers too could have been used for the disposal of the dead as one regular option, or special sites may have prompted activity in which human remains were deposited as part of more complex rituals. Such might well be argued for the evidence from Eton Rowing Lake (Fig. 2.7A; Allen and Hacking, 2000), which will be considered more fully below. On the other hand, the evidence of skulls from the Thames (Bradley and Gordon, 1988), representing deposits made from the Neolithic to Anglo-Saxon periods but especially in the Late Bronze Age and Iron Age (Schulting and Bradley, 2013), may point to a long-standing practice of river burial. To a lesser degree finds over the years from the Severn might indicate similar practices there (Bell et al., 2000). The fact that the Thames finds were almost exclusively of skulls, mostly lacking mandibles, rather than other major bones, with a bias towards males aged 25–35, suggests a highly selective ritual formula, and the possible association with metalwork at Battersea and Mortlake again raises the possibility of a complementary relationship between hoards and burials. As regards river finds, Jope many years ago discussing late Hallstatt and early La Tène daggers remarked that

On the continent many of the known daggers have come from graves, and only a few from river beds. In Britain, all those of our compact group have come from the Thames bed, most of them complete in their sheaths. As there are hardly any known graves in Britain for the earlier part of the Iron Age, the question must be raised whether these daggers could have been concerned in any way with funerary ritual.

(Jope, 1961: 321)

All of these possibilities must be considered in evaluating the evidence for Iron Age burial practices in Britain. First, however, we should examine what evidence there is for burials in cemeteries and other burial grounds.



## Communities of the dead

### Formal cemeteries and burial grounds

Burial monuments of the Neolithic and Bronze Age, individual or in cemeteries, were often located in topographically prominent positions, or in zones of concentration that might qualify as 'sacred landscapes'. In the Iron Age by contrast it is not obvious what governed the choice of location for cemeteries and smaller burial grounds, whether they were sited in relationship to settlement or whether there were traditional locations dedicated to burial. For some of the eastern Yorkshire square-ditched barrow cemeteries Bevan (1999: 137–8) considered proximity to water may have been a factor. Dent (1982: 450) stressed the siting of Arras type barrows and cemeteries adjacent to linear boundaries and trackways, a factor that is very apparent in the linear spread at Wetwang Slack. Though we may distinguish burials that are integrated into settlements from those that are segregated into cemeteries, therefore, there is no implication that cemeteries were remote from settlements. In fact, the contrary is often demonstrably the case.

### CEMETERIES AND HILLFORTS

There is some evidence that small cemeteries or burial grounds were located immediately beyond the enclosure earthworks of hillforts. At Maiden Castle, Dorset (Fig. 3.1; Wheeler, 1943), the picture is prejudiced by the dominance of the 'war cemetery' in the eastern entrance, but the reality is that there had been a burial ground just outside the ramparts well before the conquest. A possible parallel is Battlesbury, where Mrs Cunnington (1924: 373) recorded the discovery of human skeletons from time to time in a chalk quarry just outside the north-west entrance to the camp. Some of these were contracted inhumations, and apparently included one instance of an adult and child buried together. The attribution of a 'war cemetery' (Pugh and Crittall, 1957: 118)

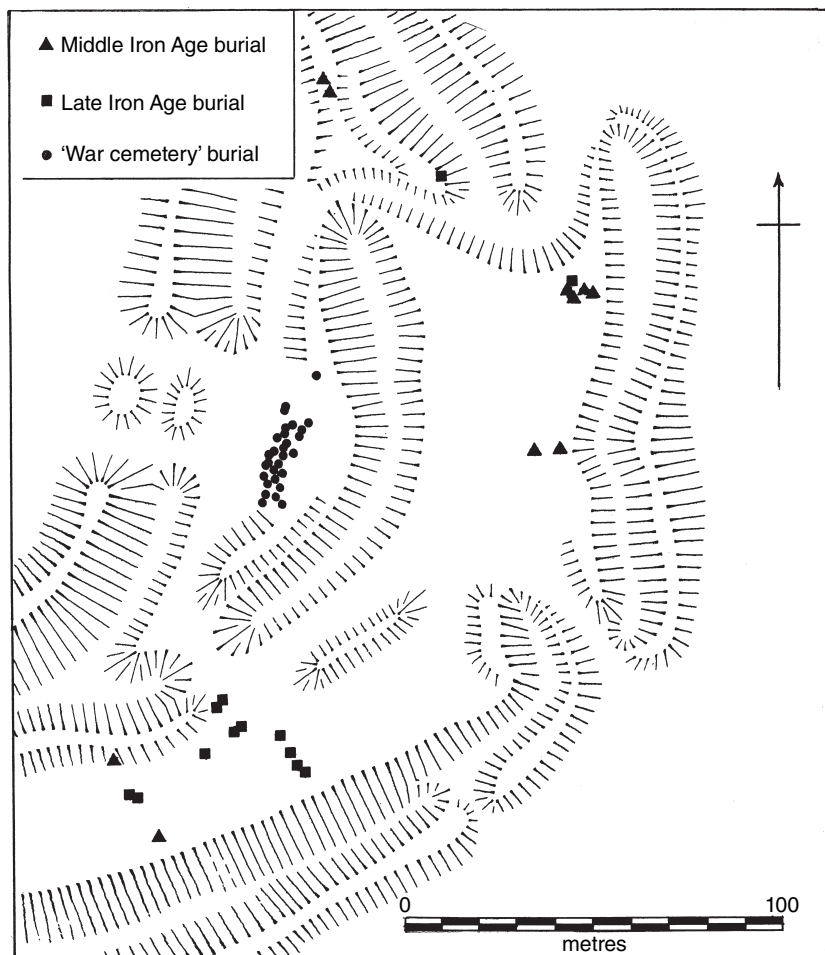


Fig. 3.1 Maiden Castle, Dorset, east entrance plan. Drawing adapted from Wheeler, 1943.

evidently refers to this external burial site, which should be distinguished from the burials excavated more than a century earlier by William Cunnington within the hillfort at its north-west end (Colt Hoare, 1812: 69).

Iron Age inhumations were also found, just within the rampart circuit, at Grimthorpe in Yorkshire (Mortimer, 1905: 150–2; Stead, 1968: 166–73). One of these was the well-known warrior burial, found in 1868. Three metres to the west was an oval pit, more than a metre deep, but only just large enough to contain a young male flexed inhumation with hands on chest and head to the north, and otherwise devoid of grave-goods. Four years later a third grave was

unearthed by workmen, comprising two burials, apparently successive, the later being slightly higher and displacing the skull of the earlier interment. These too were flexed and oriented towards the north. The burial pit contained nothing definitive in terms of dating, but Mortimer (1905: 152) assumed that the three burials were associated. Though hardly qualifying as a cemetery, smaller Iron Age burial grounds, as we shall see, often comprised relatively few graves quite widely separated, so that identification from small-scale investigations can be problematic.

One further instance of a small cemetery in close external proximity to a hillfort is Broxmouth, East Lothian (Fig. 3.2; Hill, 1982; Armit and McKenzie, 2013), where nine 'cists' contained loosely flexed inhumations without grave-goods. Not all were true cists in the sense of being slab-lined with covering slabs; two had only a covering slab with no side slabs, while one was simply an oval pit with neither side nor covering slabs. In this instance an area sufficiently large was opened to determine the limits of the cemetery, which lay just beyond the northern enclosure ditch of the hillfort. Radiocarbon dates indicated its use in the middle pre-Roman Iron Age, a chronology that has been refined by Bayesian analysis of dates linked to the stratigraphic sequence. In all these instances it seems reasonable to suppose that the cemetery was contemporary with the occupation or use of the hillfort, but equally it is clear that the scale of the cemeteries can hardly reflect more than a very small minority of the population associated with the hillfort.

## SMALL INHUMATION CEMETERIES AND BURIAL GROUNDS

As with hillforts, some Iron Age burial grounds are located in close proximity to settlements. The early-middle pre-Roman Iron Age burial ground at Suddern Farm (Fig. 3.3; Cunliffe and Poole, 2000b) was located immediately outside the southern perimeter of the early settlement, in the back-filling of an earlier chalk quarry, which was subsequently truncated by the substantial outermost ditch of the latest Iron Age enclosure. Only a limited area of its probable full extent was excavated, exposing more than thirty burials out of a total that could have been considerably greater. The regular rite was crouched inhumation, with some skeletons so tightly flexed that they may have been bound or bagged, or may have been excarnated before burial (*ibid.* 53). The graves were shallow pits, some of irregular shape, and intersection suggested that earlier interments had no visible markers. Only two had grave-goods, both adult females, one (C27) with an iron brooch that could have secured a shroud or bag, the other (C18) with an iron ring by the skull. An important conclusion from the Suddern Farm assemblage, however, was

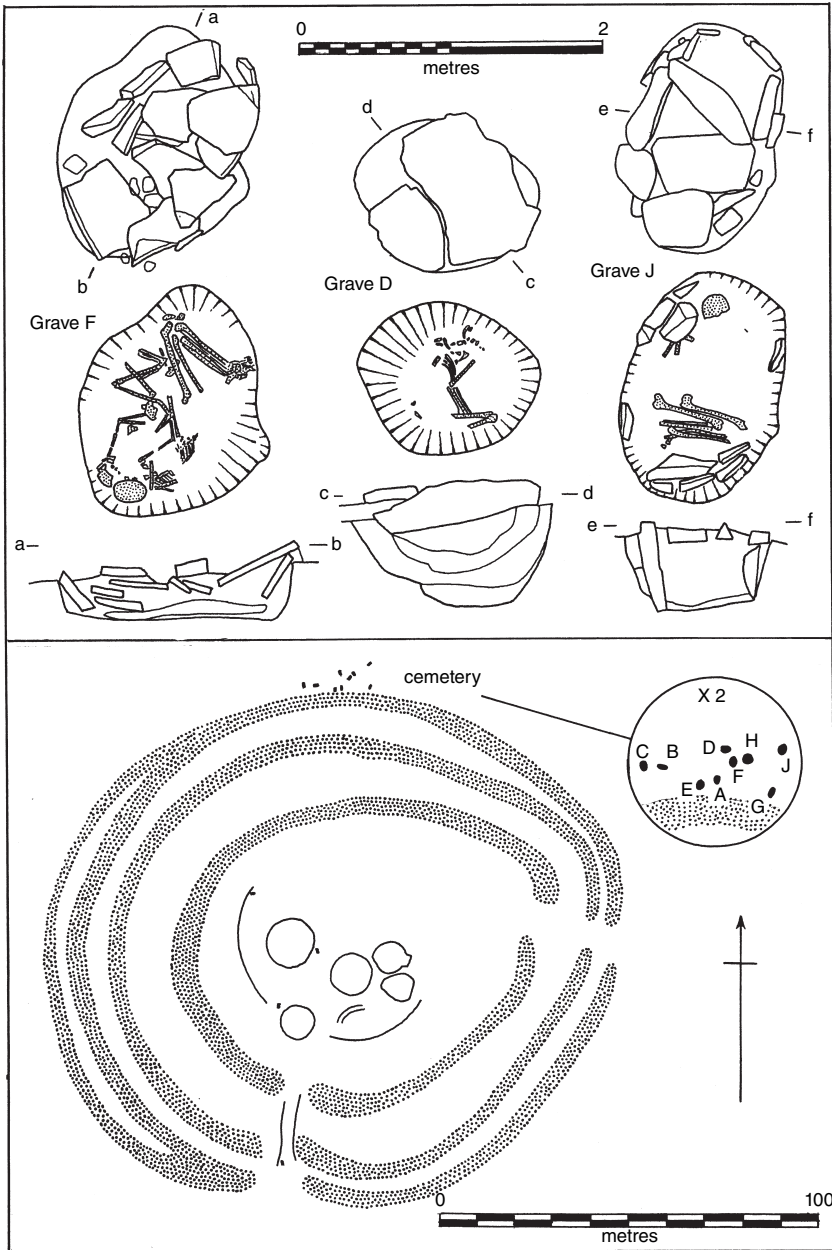


Fig. 3.2 Broxmouth, East Lothian, hillfort and cemetery plan. Drawing adapted from Hill, 1982 and Armit and McKenzie, 2013.

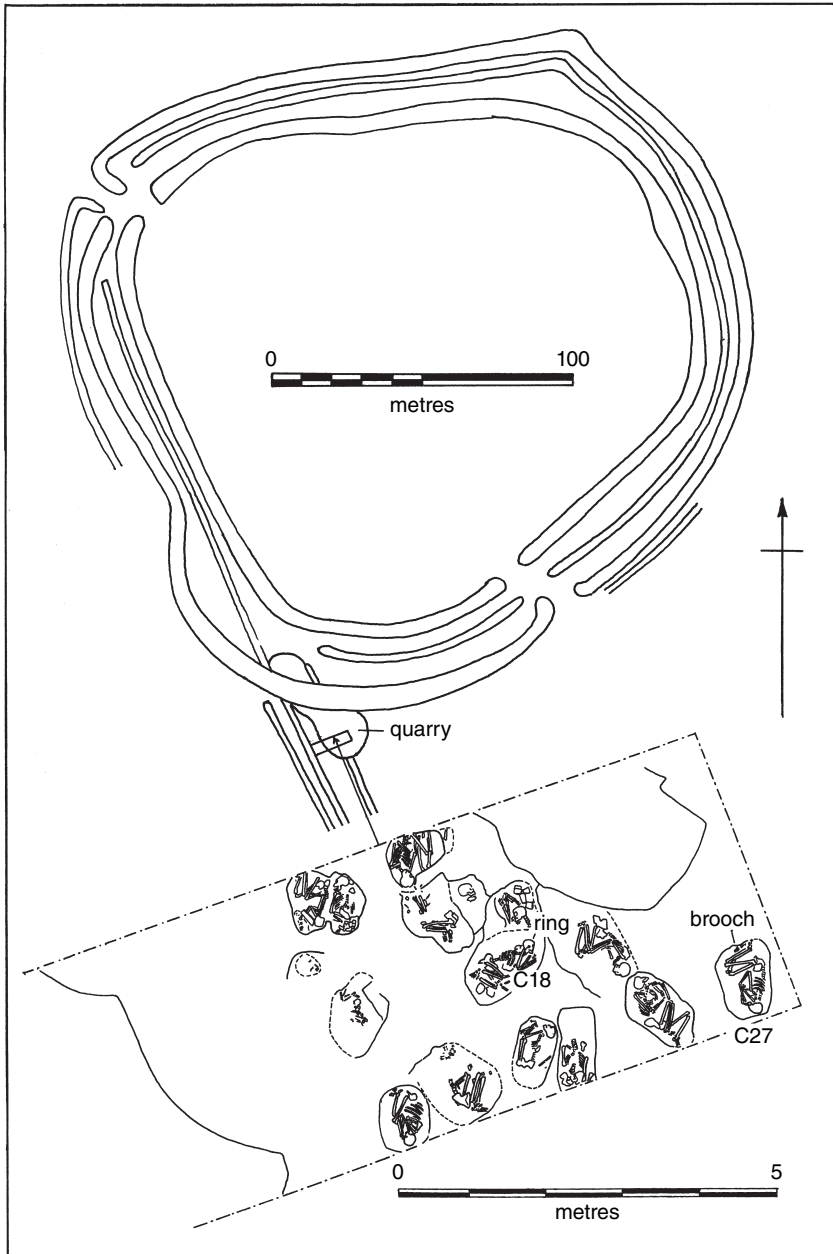


Fig. 3.3 Suddern Farm, Middle Wallop, Hampshire, enclosures and cemetery plan. Drawing adapted from Cunliffe and Poole, 2000b.



that twice as many individuals were represented as there were complete or near-complete skeletons. Fifteen skeletons were recorded, but from the anatomical assemblage Hooper (2000) estimated a minimum of thirty-one adults, nine children, and twenty infants, including several at foetal stage. This must indicate either that earlier burials were disturbed in the course of interment and their dispersed contents were haphazardly incorporated with later burials, or that disarticulated bones, previously exposed to excarnation, were deliberately included in a more complex burial process. Furthermore, the proportion of infants is high, and contrasts with prevailing wisdom that maintains that infants were excluded from interment in formal cemeteries.

Not unlike Suddern Farm was the small burial ground immediately outside the enclosure at Winnall Down, Hampshire (Fig. 3.4; Fasham, 1985). Here one adult and several infant and child burials of presumed middle Iron Age date had been deposited in quarry scoops and pits that had been dug in the earlier Iron Age. Other small groups of burials or fragmentary remains elsewhere on the site in pits, postholes, and cut into the enclosure ditch are best treated as burials integrated into the settlement. These certainly included infants, but if the north-west quarry ditch site qualifies as a burial ground, then it too included infant burials.

By contrast at Yarnton (Fig. 3.5) all five of the neonatal burials and very young (under 5) infants were from within the settlement area rather than from the external cemetery (Hey et al., 2011: table 16.2). The cemetery itself divided into a northern cluster of fifteen burials and a southern group made up of a further ten, each with one pre-teenage child, together with a dispersed group of adults and infants within the settlement area. The shallow graves had evidently been dug for the purpose, and were not domestic pits re-used. Crouched inhumation oriented broadly north-south was the majority rite, and all of the burials were complete, rather than including a range of articulated and disarticulated remnants. None of the burials, however, contained grave-goods or even pottery fragments. It was this absence of datable associations that led to the erroneous attribution of the graves to the sub-Roman or Anglo-Saxon periods before their true date was determined by radiocarbon analysis. Though the radiocarbon dates allowed the possibility that the cemetery was in use for as much as two centuries, the excavators favoured a shorter span, perhaps a couple of generations in the middle pre-Roman Iron Age, when demographically it might represent a 'normal' pattern of burial for two or three families. This, of course, would leave unexplained what the Yarnton community did with its dead over the remainder of the extended occupation of the settlement, and Boyle (2011: 187) was inclined to the view that the cemetery was a short-lived episode within a longer tradition of secondary burial involving excarnation. Nevertheless, the example of Yarnton underlines the very real possibility that simple inhumation without grave-goods may be one reason for the failure in the past to identify more Iron Age cemeteries.

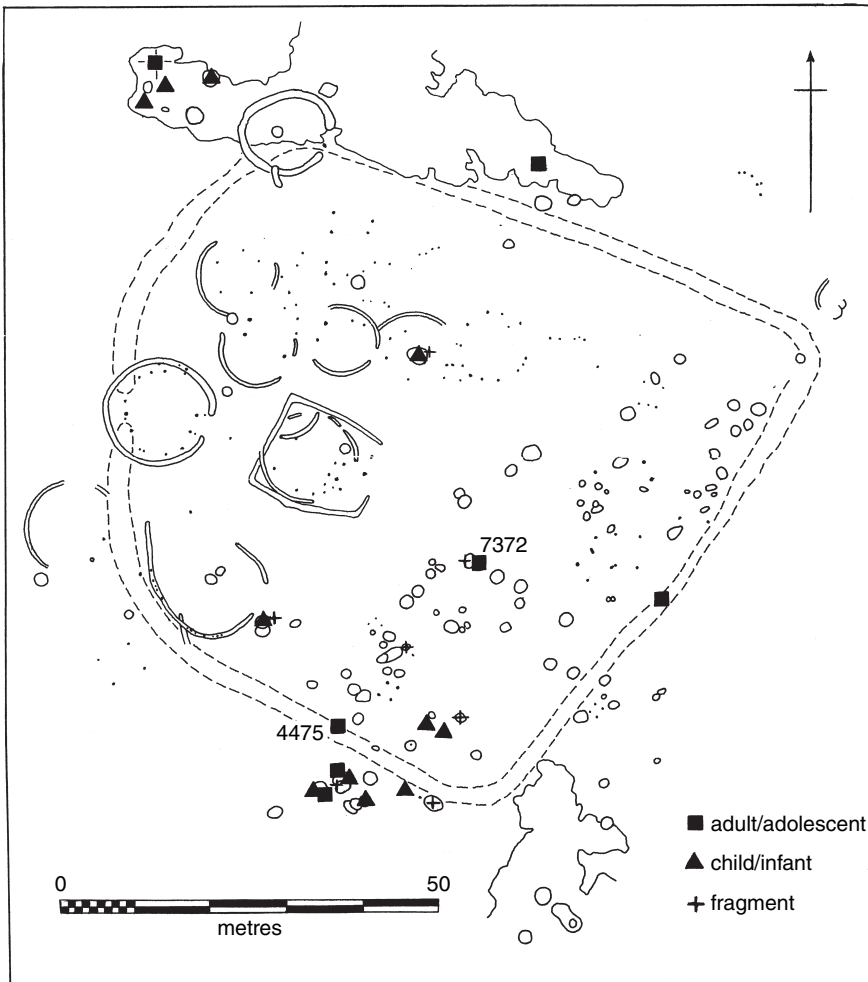


Fig. 3.4 Winnall Down, Hampshire, plan of houses, pits, and burials. Drawing adapted from Fasham, 1985.

There were a few disarticulated human remains in the pits within the settlement, like the human skull fragments with pottery and horse bones in pit 276 or the skull in pit 8591 in the adjacent Cresswell Field settlement, but there were no skeletons or partial skeletons in pits at Yarnton. Boyle's conclusion was that 'the absence of burials in pits, and paucity of disarticulated fragments (at Yarnton) is more likely to indicate that a dedicated cemetery was in existence on the periphery of the settlement' (ibid. 187).

A cemetery site that appears not to have been closely associated with a contemporary settlement is Mill Hill, Deal (Fig. 3.6; Parfitt, 1995), where there

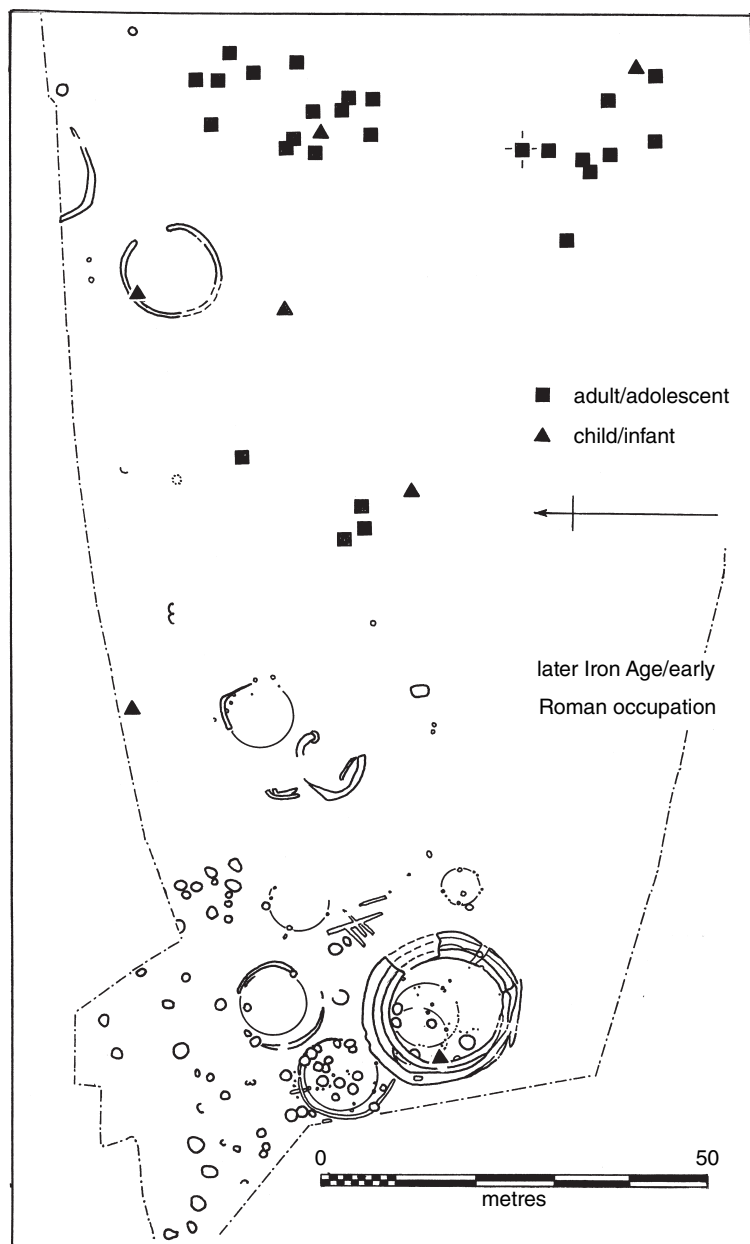


Fig. 3.5 Yarnton, Oxfordshire, plan of middle Iron Age settlement and cemeteries. Drawing adapted from Hey et al., 2011.

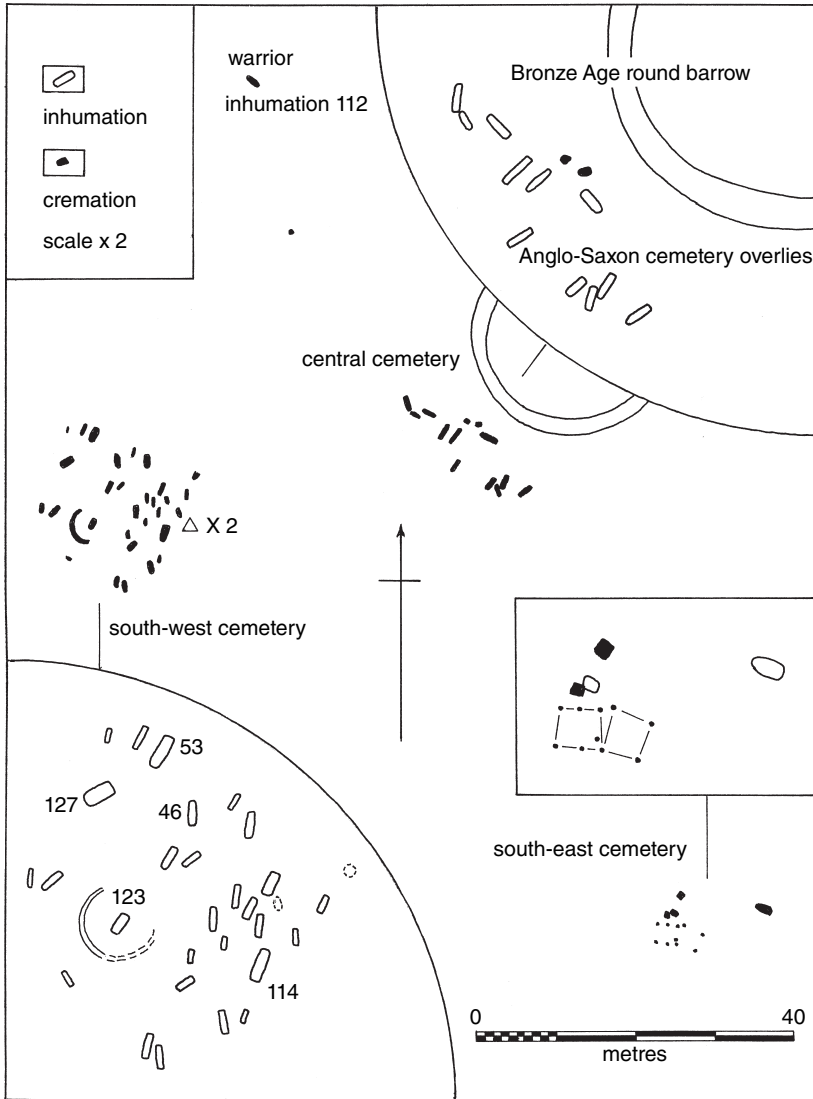


Fig. 3.6 Mill Hill, Deal, Kent, plan of cemeteries. Drawing adapted from Parfitt, 1995.

were two main concentrations of burials, dating from the second century BC to early first century AD, with some evidence of continuing burial into the Romano-British period. Both the central cemetery and the south-west cemetery comprised elongated pit graves accommodating mainly extended and supine inhumations. To the south-east was a third, small cluster of late pre-Roman burials, two inhumations and two cremations. The graves in general

were very sparsely furnished with grave-goods, though six contained brooches of La Tène 2 or La Tène 3 type. Grave 112, on the other hand, isolated from the main groupings, was a lavishly equipped 'warrior' burial, while one of the graves (X2) uncovered in 1905 in part of the quarry adjacent to the south-west cemetery contained a pair of bronze spoons of a type for which a ritual purpose has often been inferred. The possibility of some hierarchical distinction within the cemetery is further suggested by the layout of the south-west cemetery, despite the superficially irregular distribution of graves. Graves 46, 123, and especially 114 and 127 were notably larger than the others, and had vacant space immediately around them. Grave 47 might also be considered in the same category. The fact that grave 123 was surrounded by an arc of trenching suggests that these burials may have been under a small barrow mound, and the arrangement of other graves around them could indicate that these were 'focal' burials. Grave 127 produced an invioluted brooch of probable second-century date, suggesting perhaps that these were also the earliest burials in the cemetery. The largest grave 53, however, was dedicated to a horse burial, without associated artefacts other than sherds incorporated in the filling of the pit. Nine graves in the south-west cemetery were notably shorter than average, and where the skeletal remains survived sufficiently for identification, they were confirmed as graves of children. In contrast, no children were identified in the central cemetery, where eleven graves were assigned to the pre-Roman Iron Age, though distinguishing these from the later Saxon burials proved difficult in the absence of diagnostic artefacts.

The Mill Hill cemeteries are notable as inhumations that pre-date the adoption of cremation in south-eastern England from the first century BC. Potentially earlier still were the poorly preserved inhumations with cremations or pyre remains that succeeded the Late Bronze Age–earliest Iron Age enclosure 62 at Saltwood Tunnel west of Folkestone (Riddler and Trevarthen, 2006).

The possible combination of small barrows and flat graves at Mill Hill, Deal, is matched more emphatically in the recently recorded burials at Adanac Park, Southampton (Fig. 3.7; Leivers and Gibson, 2011). Unfortunately, acidic soil conditions at this key site were such that no bone material survived whatsoever, but any initial scepticism that this might engender is soon displaced by the unequivocal evidence of the barrow cemetery, notably the grave-goods from the burial pit within barrow 3, which included a sword, spearhead, shield handle and boss, together with belt suspension-rings, which clearly paralleled the warrior graves from Whitcombe, Dorset (Aitken and Aitken, 1990), Owslebury, Hampshire (Collis, 1968, 1994), Brisley Farm, Ashford, Kent (Stevenson, 2012, 2013, 2014), and elsewhere. This assemblage was the only clear indication of the date of the barrow cemetery, which may reasonably be regarded as late pre-Roman Iron Age. What is distinctive about Adanac Park

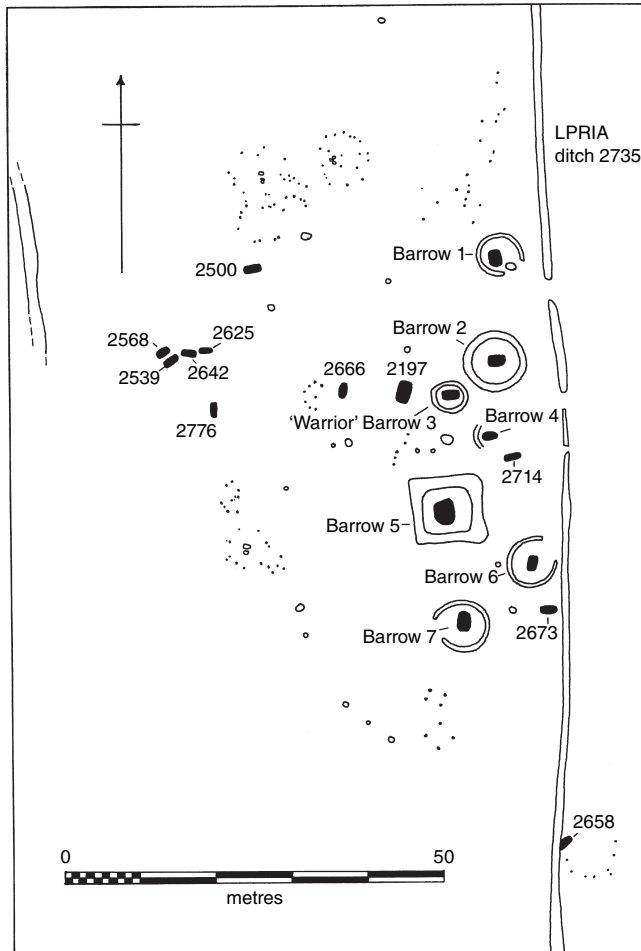


Fig. 3.7 Adanac Park, Southampton, cemetery plan. Drawing adapted from Leivers and Gibson, 2011.

is that the seven barrows include several variants, one square-ditched, others circular or penannular. All had a single burial pit located centrally within the ditched enclosure, with the exception of barrow 5, the square-ditched example, which had a secondary burial cut into the central grave-pit. Barrow 5 was also odd in plan in that its corners cut through four earlier pits, perhaps reflecting a two-phase burial matching the recut central grave. The barrows were quite closely spaced in a linear spread, just to the west of a linear boundary that extended north–south across the site. The simple graves, of which eleven were identified, were more widely distributed across the area opened, with the exception of four that were quite closely grouped on the

west side of the distribution. A problem arises regarding the dating of these, and whether they should be considered as earlier than or broadly contemporary with the barrow cemetery. The combination of burial types certainly reinforces the potential diversity of practice in burial rites.

These smaller burial grounds may comprise small clusters, sometimes separated spatially, or may be more widely dispersed, so that identification of their full extent will depend on how extensively the site was investigated. Three inhumations uncovered in West Hay field at West Lane, Kemble in Gloucestershire (King et al., 1996), for example, could have been part of a small inhumation cemetery, the rest of which was destroyed in the construction of the adjacent A429 road. The burials lacked formal grave-goods, but were dated on the basis of Iron Age sherds from their pit fillings, and were not apparently secondary burials within a dense group of pits. Burial 21, a young adult male, was of particular interest in its crouched but face down posture, and because the hands were between the feet as if they had been tied to the ankles at the time of deposition. Other small groups of inhumation burials have been recorded at Cockey Down, near Salisbury (Lovell, 1999) and at Gallows Leaze, Berrick Salome, in the Thames valley (Wilson, 2008).

In the far south-west the pit burials at Trethellan Farm, Newquay (Fig. 3.8; Nowakowski, 1991) show similar characteristics to these simple pit grave cemeteries, though the site's location within the distribution zone of the distinctive south-western cist-burials suggests that it was part of that cultural tradition. The cemetery was situated on a terrace overlooking the Gannel estuary, where there had been an earlier Bronze Age settlement, and where expansion northward was constrained by a steep scarp. Its eastern and western limits lay under modern development, so that its true extent could have been larger. The linear spread thus created was divided by the excavator into an eastern and western cluster, those at the western end being somewhat smaller and shallower than those towards the east, which also included several of more rectilinear plan. Nevertheless, two of the earlier graves, burial 3018, from which an iron involuted brooch was recovered, and burial 2184, which included a La Tène 2 variant, were centrally located, so that any chronological expansion was evidently not unilinear. Skeletal preservation was poor, but insofar as it could be determined, orientation was predominantly to the north. There was also some evidence for double burials of adults with children, and for intrusive secondary burials, though poor preservation made these hard to confirm. Grave-goods were limited to small personal ornaments, which, in the case of the brooches, including La Tène 3 variants of the first century BC, may have been used to pin shrouds or funerary garments. The significance of pit burial as opposed to the use of cist-graves at Trethellan should probably not be exaggerated, since the difference may be down to local factors that need not affect the overall

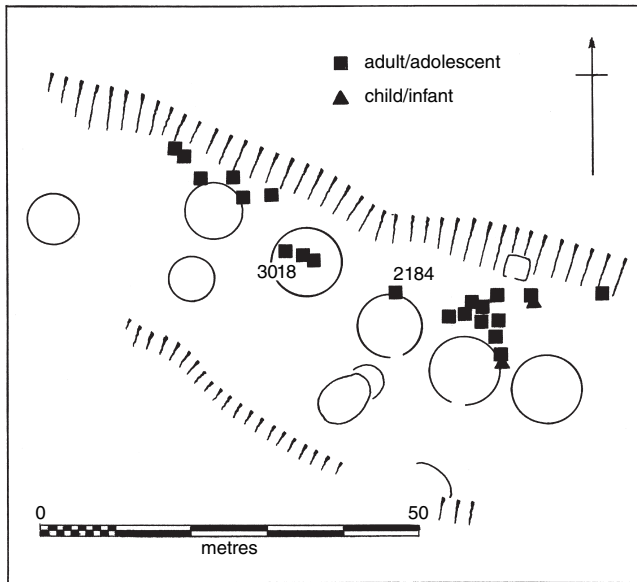


Fig. 3.8 Trethellan Farm, Newquay, Cornwall, cemetery plan. Drawing adapted from Nowakowski, 1991.

funerary rite. It suggests that the distinction between pit graves and cist-graves is not culturally diagnostic, any more than it is within the Durotrigan zone of south Dorset.

Just north of the Humber at Melton (Fig. 3.9; Fenton-Thomas, 2011) a small inhumation cemetery of simple graves was accompanied by a square-ditched barrow, again exemplifying the potential diversity of practice, though contemporary use can only be inferred. There were also simple inhumation burials at Garton Slack (Brewster, 1980), though they are generally overlooked by commentators in their preoccupation with the more distinctive square-ditched barrow cemeteries and chariot burials. In one area of Garton Slack there was a cemetery of around twenty inhumations that was destroyed before there was an opportunity to excavate or record the remains (*ibid.* 148), and in areas 1 and 2 adjacent to four square-ditched barrows there were simple crouched adult male and female inhumations and at least one infant. There were also isolated burials that may have been the result of shallow barrow ditches being eroded by ploughing, but Brewster certainly accepted that simple graves occurred 'in small groups or in cemeteries' (*ibid.* 41) without mounds or surrounding barrow ditches. Some of these must have been contemporary with the square-ditched barrows, and associated finds, though not common, suggested a span from the early Iron Age to the late pre-Roman period.



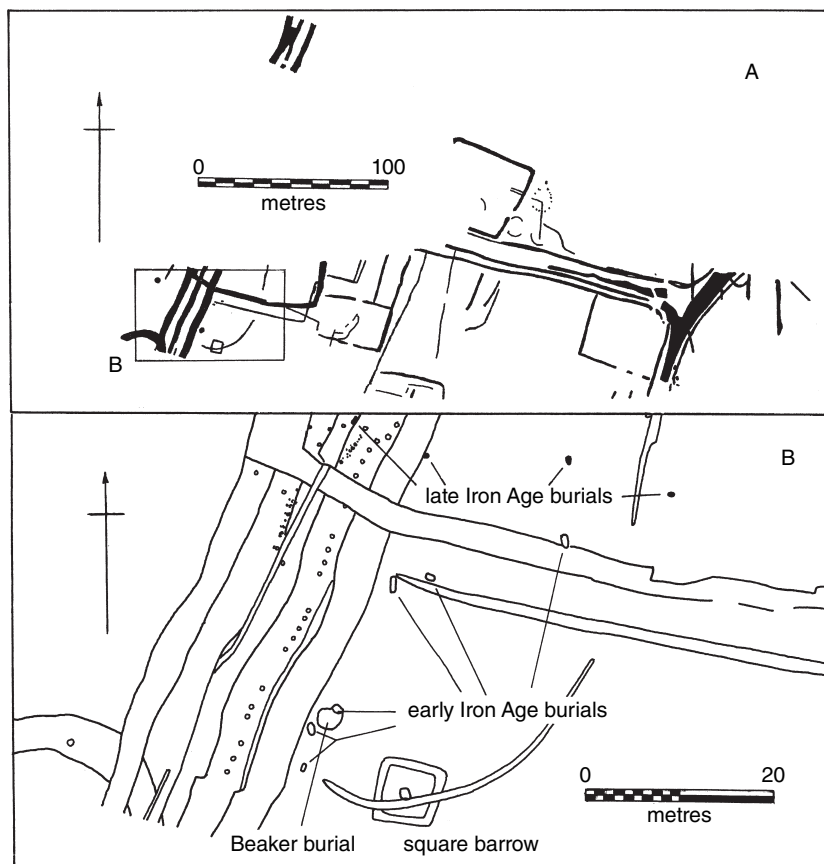


Fig. 3.9 Melton, Yorkshire, cemetery plan. Drawing adapted from Fenton-Thomas, 2011.

In area 10 at Garton Slack (Fig. 3.10) more remarkably there was a burial ground apparently dedicated to around thirty infant burials, mostly in small, circular graves among a palimpsest of pits and gullies. The crouched or slightly flexed inhumations displayed a preferred orientation to the north, though a significant minority was aligned east or west. The absence of grave-goods made it hard to assign the cemetery to period, but the excavator was adamant that it lay beneath the Romano-British levels, and that the graves conspicuously did not contain any Roman material, indicating a pre-Roman Iron Age date (*ibid.* 301). Within the area of the cemetery there were also pits containing animal burials that did contain some Iron Age sherds, again with no Roman pottery in their fillings. If this represents a dedicated infant cemetery then it uniquely indicates some special treatment for infants who were not

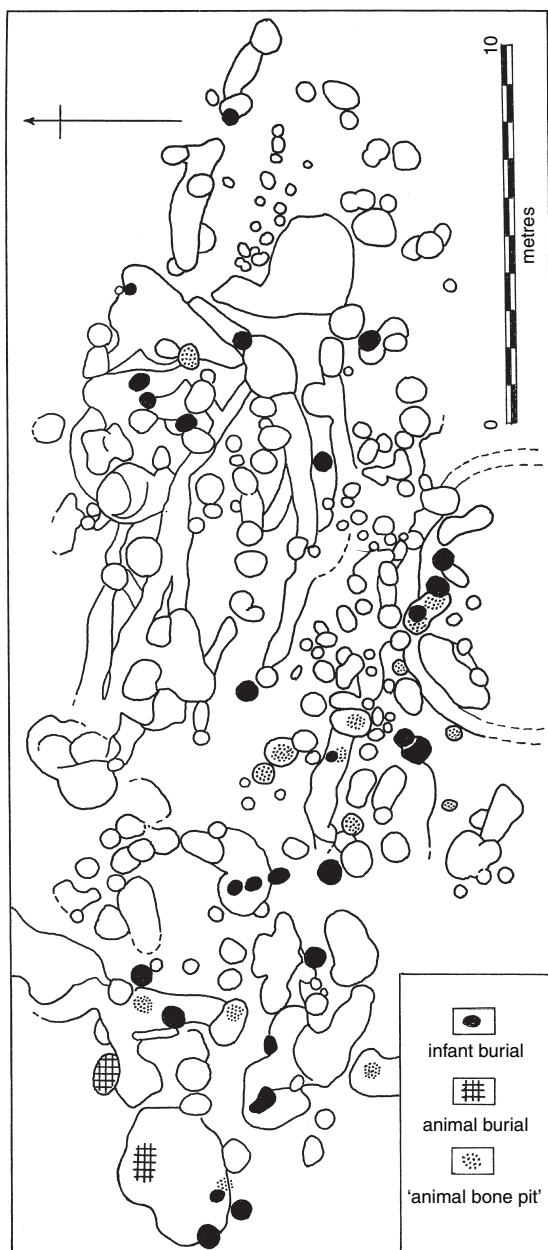


Fig. 3.10 Garton Slack, Yorkshire, plan of infant cemetery. Drawing adapted from Brewster, 1980.

excluded altogether from funerary rites on grounds of social immaturity. As we have already noted, a regular place of interment of infants in the eastern Yorkshire cemeteries was the ditches of square-ditched barrows, as in barrow 4 at Garton Slack, where ten infants were found individually buried in the surrounding ditch.

Identifying Iron Age burials in Scotland has been problematic. It is possible that ring-barrows could have been mistaken for house sites, as suggested for the Newbridge, Midlothian, ring-ditches (Carter et al., 2010: 35–6), particularly given the paucity of datable material associations. But Iron Age burials have occasionally been identified. At Dryburn Bridge in East Lothian (Fig. 3.11; Triscott, 1982; Dunwell, 2007) rescue excavation revealed a linear series of ten simple pit graves within the occupied area of the settlement, though confined to its north-west sector. The burials were mainly flexed inhumations with a preference for lying on the left side with head to the north. They included a mix of male and female, all adults, with no evidence of infants or neonatal remains. There were no grave-goods, and pit filling comprised introduced stony rubble rather than the sand and gravel that had been dug out of them, which may therefore have formed a low mound marking the grave. Four of the pits were located along the north-western circuit of the early palisade, suggesting a classic 'liminal' setting, except that two of the grave-pits cut through the palisade trench, which they therefore post-dated. Radiocarbon dates at best provide a broad span between 800 and 400 BC for the use of the cemetery. It was thus not possible to establish exactly with which structures among the round-houses and four-posters the graves may have been contemporary, but the cemetery is certainly more closely integrated into the overall site layout than is evidenced elsewhere. Contrastingly, there was no evidence for isolated bones being deposited within or around the buildings or enclosures, thus endorsing Boyle's law based on the Yarnton experience regarding the potentially exclusive occurrence of fragmentary remains and formal burials. One striking factor regarding the Dryburn Bridge cemetery, however, is the fact that it straddled two cist-burials, one of an adult male and child with a Beaker, the other a double burial without grave-goods, both yielding radiocarbon values centring on the Early Bronze Age. With otherwise only very ephemeral evidence for earlier prehistoric activity on the site, it is hard to explain the presence of these graves, but the fact that they were undisturbed by prolonged Iron Age occupation might indicate an enduring sense of the site's significance as a burial ground.

Individual cists have been uncovered from several sites across the Lothian Plain, and occasionally multiple burials have been recorded, as at Lochend, Dunbar (Longworth, 1966). Among older discoveries, some forty cairns were investigated in the early twentieth century at Gullane, one evidently containing several burials but the majority with just one. Dating was tenuous, but a bronze spiral ring, small iron knife, and whorl would be consistent with an

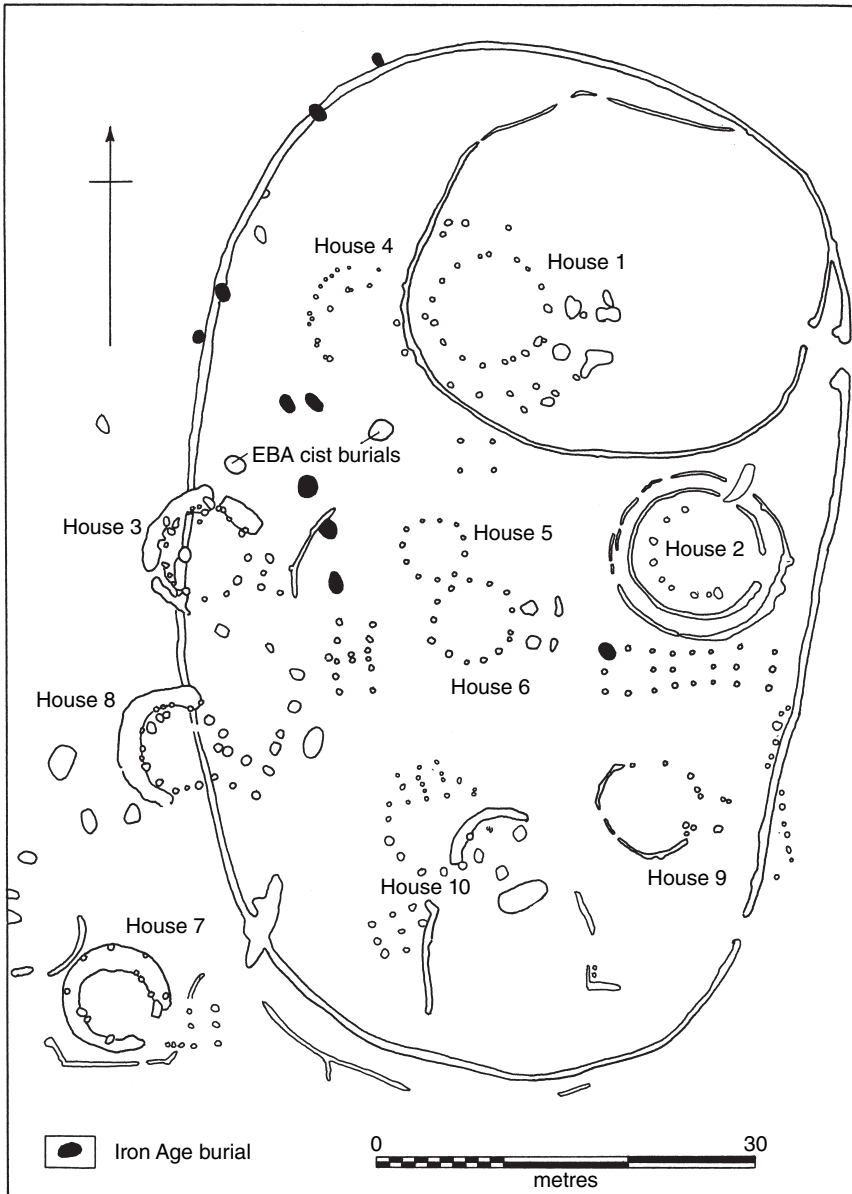


Fig. 3.11 Dryburn Bridge, East Lothian, settlement plan with burials. Drawing adapted from Triscott, 1982 and Dunwell, 2007.

Iron Age attribution. Unfortunately, this early experiment in community archaeology seems to have got out of control, causing the excavator to regret that,

roused to excitement by the first excavation, a mob should, on the following day, have applied their ill-directed energy to the exploration of these cairns; and... much valuable information has been lost.

(Ewart and Curle, 1908: 337–8)

From Atlantic Scotland the evidence for Iron Age burials is limited (Tucker, 2010b). At Galson in Lewis the machair has yielded burials intermittently over the years (Stevenson, 1952; Neighbour et al., 2000) that precede the more general adoption of long cist burial in the early Christian period. Martin Cook has recently excavated several apparently isolated graves in the Western Isles and there is some evidence for earlier graves within later Iron Age cemeteries.

#### SQUARE-DITCHED BARROW CEMETERIES OF EASTERN YORKSHIRE

Dating of the barrow cemeteries of eastern Yorkshire to the middle pre-Roman Iron Age has conventionally been based on artefact associations, which were thought to indicate a span from the early fourth to the late second centuries BC, though their earliest appearance and eventual demise has always been debatable. The earliest types, a couple of high-arched Marzabotto-type brooches from Cowlam and Burton Fleming, might have suggested an initial date in the early fourth century, but these early finds were few and far between, and may have been long-lived survivals. Though there are a couple of late La Tène brooches with foot and bow cast in one piece from Wetwang Slack and Rudston, which might have indicated survival of the funerary rite into the first century BC, the general absence of late La Tène material has always suggested that it went out of fashion by the end of the second century. Recent programmes of radiocarbon dating (Jay et al., 2012), as we have seen, have now suggested that the majority of burials at Wetwang Slack, the largest inhumation cemetery in Britain with well over 400 graves, probably lasted no more than 150 years around the mid-third to the early second centuries, though it remains possible that the radiocarbon sampling programme did not detect the earliest graves in the cemetery. If this more compressed chronology is accepted and applied to the Yorkshire cemeteries generally, then the scabbards from Wetwang Slack and Kirkburn, with their open-ring chapes in the early La Tène tradition and with their insular variant of the ‘developed’ early La Tène style of ornament, must have been heirlooms, treasured over several

generations before being deposited in their graves. Furthermore, shortening the span of the Arras series of formal cemeteries would highlight the need to consider the more ephemeral burial evidence from eastern Yorkshire, which might look rather more like the burials we have considered from other parts of southern Britain.

Square-ditched barrows have been recognized as a key facet of the Arras culture since the nineteenth century, but it was not until the excavations at Burton Fleming, Rudston, and Wetwang Slack, supplemented by the ever-burgeoning evidence of air-photography, that it was fully appreciated how extensive this phenomenon truly was (Fig. 3.12). Large cemeteries of more than fifty graves on current evidence constitute less than 10 per cent of the known sites, so that the majority may have served relatively small communities. A question seldom asked by archaeologists is why these barrows should have had *square*-ditch enclosures, when the normal expectation for the construction of a conical barrow mound would have been a circular ditch. This suggests that the ditch was not simply a quarry for the mound material, but was designed as an enclosure to demarcate the sacred burial precinct and to segregate the dead from the living. Could the barrow enclosure have served as a mortuary enclosure prior to interment, even if this meant double handling of the spoil from the ditch to create a mound over the grave? The use of a square ditch is clearly not an exclusive cultural indicator, as we have already seen from Adanac Park and elsewhere, though it is characteristic of the Arras series of eastern Yorkshire and early La Tène antecedents in continental Europe. The assumption of a unitary phenomenon, illustrated by the impromptu extension of Stead's (1979: fig. 10) distribution map to include the Lunan Water sites in Angus, was subsequently negated by the dating of Boysack Mills (Murray and Ralston, 1997) and more particularly Redcastle (Alexander, 2005) to the para- and post-Roman later Iron Age.

Square-ditched barrow mounds would never have been of monumental proportions, and most cemeteries have been reduced by ploughing. The cemetery at Scarborough (Fig. 3.13) is a notable exception, where more than a hundred barrows remain extant, among which several are larger than average (Fig. 3.14). Cemeteries may vary in number of barrows from a handful grouped together or in alignment to several hundred in major concentrations, notably at Wetwang Slack and in the Rudston–Burton Fleming linear spread. Barrows vary considerably in size, from 3 or 4 metres to 10 metres square and more; Dent (2010: 65–6) argued that the largest barrows of Cowlam type in the 12–15 metre range may have been the earliest, whilst those with deep burial pits and smaller square enclosures may be later. The absence of a surviving central grave-pit in many of these largest barrows implies burial on the ground surface. In the Makeshift cemetery at Rudston around half of the barrows over 7 metres square yielded no central grave (Stead, 1991: 7), while at Garton Station of four barrows over 8 metres square only the chariot

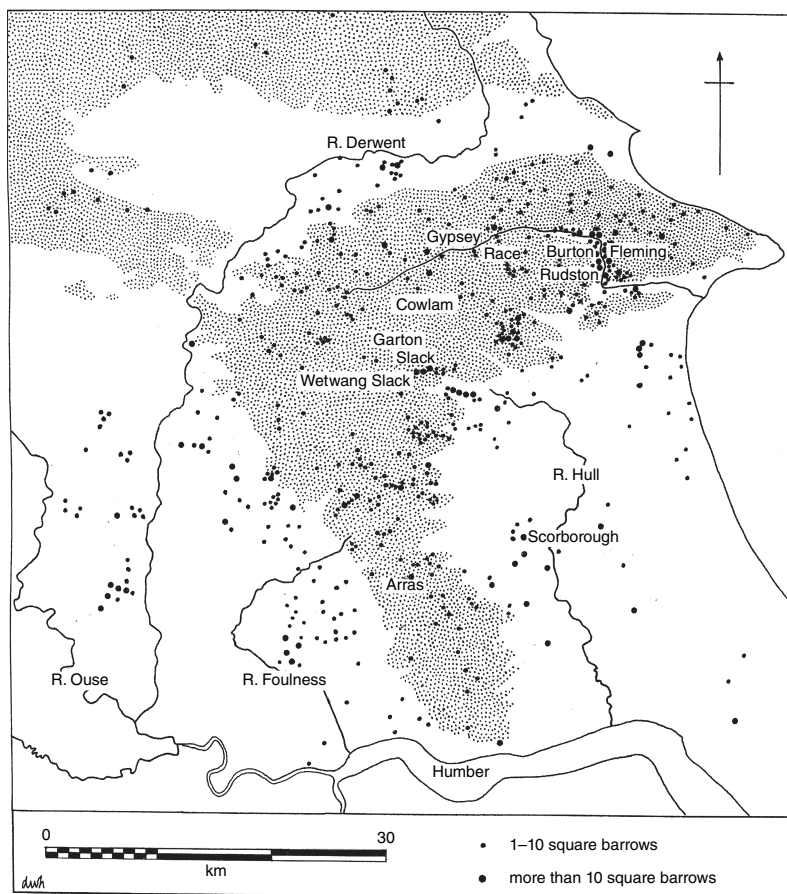


Fig. 3.12 Map of square-ditched barrows in eastern Yorkshire. Drawing adapted from Stoertz, 1997; Ramm, 1976; and Halkon, 2013.

burial had a surviving central grave (*ibid.* 17). Relatively few barrows have circular ditch plans, among which were four from Garton Station that were notable as examples of the so-called ‘spear ritual’, a rite which will be discussed in due course. In some instances, as at the northern end of the Rudston cemetery, several barrows conjoin in clusters; in other instances, as in the southern and central sectors at Rudston, they are aligned in rows.

In general a single burial occupies a pit in the centre of the square ditch. This seems like an extraordinarily profligate use of space, and one might have expected that there would have been secondary burials in or around the barrow, so that the central grave might then have been regarded as ‘focal’. Secondary burials are comparatively rare, though burials in barrow ditches were recorded at Rudston, Burton Fleming, and Wetwang Slack.

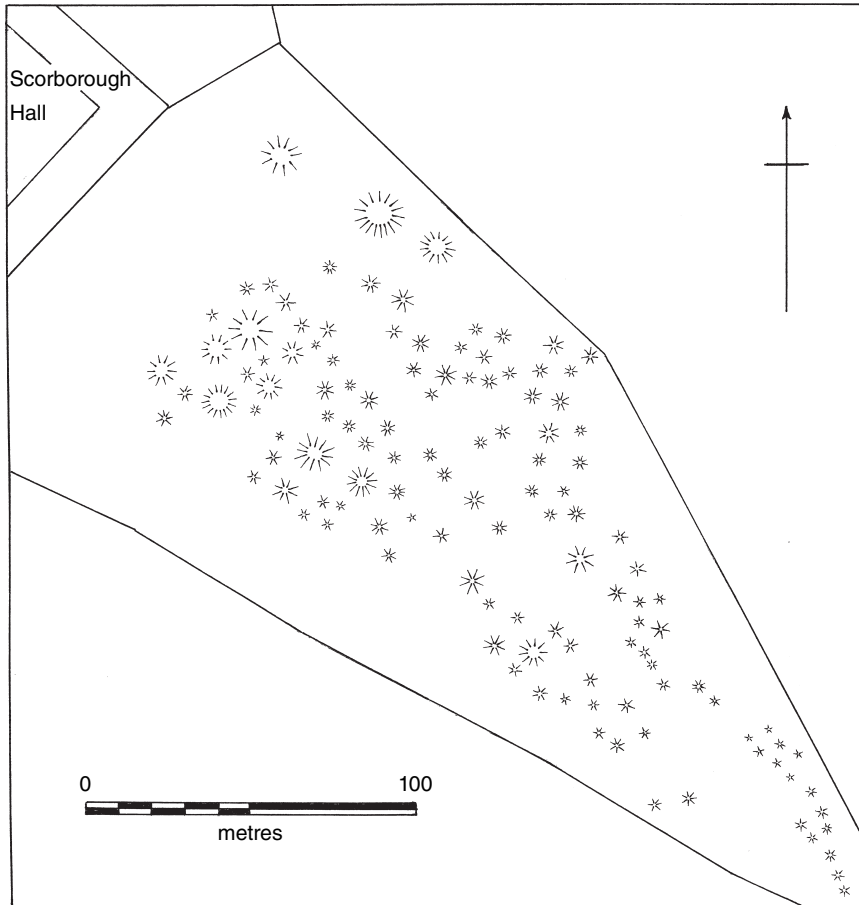


Fig. 3.13 Scarborough, Yorkshire, cemetery plan. Drawing adapted from Stead, 1979.

Any secondary interments in the mound, of course, would have been destroyed by ploughing, but this possibility must have been limited by its modest scale. Scattered among the square-ditched barrows are some simple pit inhumations, leading Stead (1991: 7) to suggest that the surrounding ditch may have been so shallow that it has been ploughed out, which plainly was the case in several instances at Rudston, where just residual traces survived. Even so, we should not discount the possibility that simple grave burial was one option, as it appears to have been at Garton Slack.

The funerary rite is almost exclusively inhumation, predominantly crouched, with only the later cemetery at Makeshift showing a preference for extended or slightly flexed inhumation. The majority of the dead are laid on their left sides, with head towards the north at Burton Fleming, Rudston,





Fig. 3.14 Scarborough, Yorkshire, view of extant barrows. Photograph by D. W. Harding.

and Wetwang, or north-east at Danes Graves, though a significant minority was oriented reciprocally towards the south or south-west. Once again, the later cemetery at Makeshift was the exception, with fifty-four burials oriented towards east or west. The contrasting orientation of the Makeshift cemeteries is unique, but warrants closer consideration. In addition to the fact that the east-west oriented burials were predominantly extended or flexed, they also lacked pottery among their grave-goods and only one had a brooch. By contrast, swords, spears, shields, knives, and tools featured in significant numbers. Furthermore, meat deposits in the east-west graves were invariably pork, in contrast to lamb in the north-south burials. On the basis of associated grave-goods and the difference in meat offerings, Parker Pearson (1999b) grouped these with his higher-status burials, in contrast to the dominant 'commoner' rite of north-south orientation with sheep bones, a distinction that has not been supported on the basis of isotope analysis (Giles, 2012: 114). Skeletal analysis showed that the distinction in orientation was certainly not based on gender, so that the excavator's conclusion was in favour of a chronological sequence. Only one east-west grave actually cut through a north-south grave, but the overall layout suggested that the east-west cemetery had been located within the pattern established by the north-south cemetery. Finally, the association of a La Tène 3 brooch with one east-west burial, and the fact that four of the ten swords from east-west graves had straight hilt-ends in the La Tène 3 fashion (the others being of the

earlier campanulate form), indicated that the east–west cemetery continued in use into the first century BC and possibly later, reinforcing the belief that the shift in posture, orientation, and associated grave-goods was the result of a change in burial convention over time. What induced these changes nevertheless remains an enigma. The extended posture of the inhumations and the inclusion of weapons shows closer affinities with continental middle La Tène cemeteries than any other Iron Age cemetery in Britain, yet like the earlier square-ditched barrow cemeteries or the chariot burials of the eastern Yorkshire series the total absence of any associated artefacts of demonstrably continental manufacture precludes their interpretation as a product of direct introduction from continental Europe. Apart from isolated exceptions, the east–west orientation is not witnessed in other square-ditched barrow cemeteries in eastern Yorkshire, though the limited extent of modern large-scale excavation beyond the Rudston–Burton Fleming and Garton–Wetwang Slack districts allows the possibility that others may remain to be discovered.

Double or multiple burials occur occasionally. The three adults, child, and infant from barrow 46 at Danes Graves certainly look like a possible family group, apparently buried at the same time, while from the same cemetery barrows 56, 67, and 93, discounting the chariot burial under barrow 43, all contained two adults, buried on top of each other or side by side. At Rudston two females, one a mature adult, the other a young adult, were buried side by side in grave R118 in inverted north–south, south–north orientations, while two mature females in grave R73 were facing each other on an east–west orientation, one crouched and the other extended. In R152 a mature adult male with an iron spearhead in his ribs was accompanied by a young adult male. Both were extended inhumations on a west–east orientation. All of these appear to have been simultaneous interments. In R51, on the other hand, a mature adult, possibly female, oriented north–south, had been swept aside to accommodate the burial of an adult of undetermined sex on the opposite orientation. It is obviously possible that two individuals could have died at the same time for various reasons, or that the body of one could have been curated until the death of the second, but the circumstances under which double or multiple burials appear to have been deposited simultaneously is an issue that has not adequately been addressed.

The Garton Slack–Wetwang Slack landscape is unique in providing significant evidence of settlement in proximity to the cemeteries (Brewster, 1980). A swathe of round-houses extended along the valley bottom broadly parallel to the cemetery; where they coincided with barrows the round-houses were evidently earlier, but in the broader time-scale they presumably nevertheless represent the dwellings of the population buried in the cemeteries. Dent (1982) argued that the more scattered groups of burials of Garton Slack originated in the earlier Iron Age, and that it was the creation of the extensive

enclosure system along the valley that induced the nucleation of the associated cemetery along its principal linear boundary. Despite its apparent size, he calculated that, given a probable time-span between 200 and 400 years, the total number of burials would have resulted from a village population between 35 and 84 individuals. From aerial survey it would appear that in this area of the wolds cemeteries may have been sited within a kilometre or so of each other, with somewhat smaller cemeteries in the Burton Fleming district perhaps no more than half a kilometre apart. He therefore concluded that they served extended family groups over a protracted period of time rather than larger communities.

The range of material artefacts in square-ditched barrow graves is very limited. Apart from occasional knives or tools, brooches and bracelets with the occasional pin dominate the inventory. Pottery vessels are not common; there were twenty-nine from the Makeshift cemetery at Rudston, the largest number from any excavated cemetery, but still representing only around one in six of the graves (Stead, 1991: 109). There was only one from Wetwang Slack. They were all of coarse, local ware and remarkably limited in range of size or shapes. They occurred in both male and female graves, often with brooches but never with weapons, and, in contrast to other funerary traditions in Britain and abroad, never more than one per grave. By comparison with some earlier prehistoric funerary ceramics they may seem crude in the extreme, and similar wares have been recovered from domestic contexts (Challis and Harding, 1975: 75). Their similarity in size and shape may nevertheless indicate that they were custom-made for whatever purpose they served in the funerary rites. Together with metalwork types, they certainly argue against any direct continental influence in the material culture of Iron Age eastern Yorkshire.

### CIST-GRAVES AND CEMETERIES IN SOUTH-WEST ENGLAND

Though the known distribution is hardly dense (Fig. 3.15), cist-grave cemeteries dating to the closing centuries BC and the opening centuries AD in the south-west peninsula and Isles of Scilly are sufficiently distinctive to qualify as a recurrent regional class of burial. The main cemeteries, like Harlyn Bay (Bullen, 1912; Whimster, 1977b), Trevone (Trollope, 1860; Dudley and Jope, 1965), Stamford Hill (Bate, 1866), Trelan Bahow (Rogers, 1873), and Porth Cressa, St Mary's on the Isles of Scilly (Ashbee, 1954, 1979), range in size from around a dozen graves to more than a hundred. Though Trethellan Farm (Nowakowski, 1991) is often conflated with this group (Cunliffe, 2005: 551) its burials were not in cist-graves, and thus strictly not of the same series, if grave construction is the defining characteristic. In effect, the corpus of south-

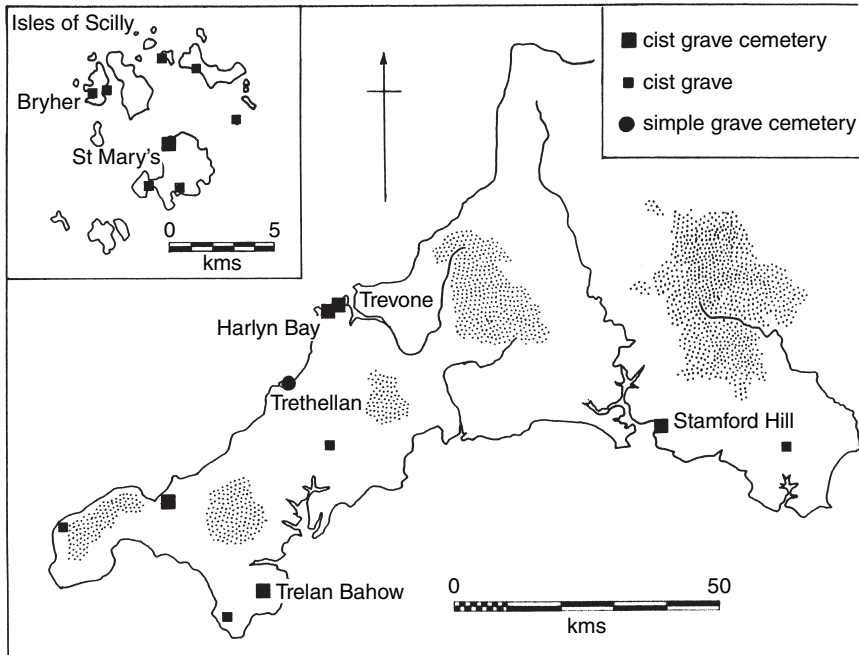


Fig. 3.15 Map of cemeteries in south-western England. Drawing by D. W. Harding.

western cist-grave cemeteries has not significantly changed since Whimster (1981) defined the series.

Harlyn Bay (Fig. 3.16) remains the largest and, for all its shortcomings, the most informative of the Cornish cist cemeteries. Though Bullen's (1912) record was apparently second-hand and lacking a plan, Whimster (1977b, 1981) was able to reconstruct a partial plan on the basis of field notes, from which he was able to make some general observations. The cists were broadly of a standard size, sufficient to contain a crouched inhumation, apart from five smaller graves of infants. They were oriented north-south, the dead laid with head to the north with only the one exception of the uniquely trapezoidal cist 51. The plan shows a tendency towards arrangement in rows, a feature that was stressed in Bullen's account. He also observed that in some cases the cists were placed on top of each other, apparently sometimes but not always disturbing the lower graves, evidently because over time the cemetery was engulfed by wind-blown sand. In general the rite was single inhumation, but in several instances graves had been used for simultaneous double burial. Exceptions to the general pattern included a circular grave 56, of unknown location, that was divided by a partition wall, one half containing two crouched adults and an infant, the other a single adult; from evidence of

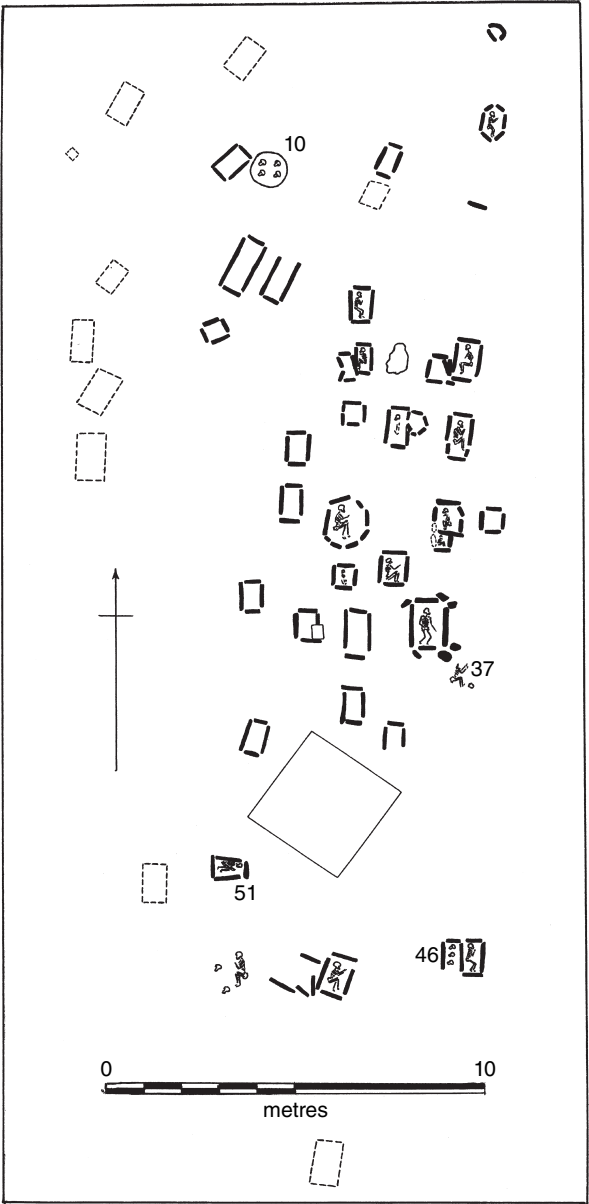


Fig. 3.16 Harlyn Bay, Cornwall, cemetery plan. Drawing adapted from Whimster, 1981.

disturbance, Whimster concluded in this instance that a family tomb may have been re-used for subsequent burials. Two cists contained multiple human skulls, cist 10 having four arranged in a square with a fifth above them, and 46 having three aligned north–south and all facing west. The significance of these deposits is unclear, and though at least one other burial at Harlyn Bay (37) had its head severed, these two burials remain unparalleled locally or more widely. For the most part the Harlyn Bay burials seem not to have had grave-goods, though the two disc-footed brooches, matched by another from the Stamford Hill cemetery (Bate, 1866; Clarke, 1971), with affinities to types from Aquitaine and beyond the Pyrenees, are well known. Even accepting these as insular products, it is hard to avoid the conclusion that Harlyn Bay must have been in use from around the fourth century BC until the late pre-Roman Iron Age. Whilst Atlantic seaborne connections are implicit in the cemeteries' coastal locations (Henderson, 2007: 279), the case for the cist-grave rite of crouched inhumation with head to the north being an essentially indigenous tradition remains persuasive.

Trevone, barely 2 kilometres east of Harlyn Bay towards Padstow, was also a nineteenth-century discovery, ill recorded and never fully published. From contemporary accounts the lower, Iron Age cemetery of cist-graves oriented north–south appears to have been overlain by a later, possibly early Christian cemetery on an east–west axis. The Iron Age dating of the earlier cemetery, however, was endorsed by the discovery of a cist in 1955 that is assumed to have been an outlier of the same cemetery (Dudley and Jope, 1965). The cist was larger than most, being designed to accommodate an extended inhumation, albeit oriented with head to the north. The importance of this Trevone find was its two brooches, both representative of the highly innovative products of British brooch-makers in the middle pre-Roman Iron Age. Jope was perhaps conservative in dating these brooches, which should surely belong to the earlier third century BC.

The size of the Trelan Bahow cemetery, uncovered in 1833, is uncertain, but it evidently included at least one burial with a fuller complement of grave-goods than normal, including a bronze mirror, and possibly also the brooches, rings, and beads recorded from the site. The furthest east of the peninsular cist-grave cemeteries, at Stamford Hill, Plymstock, uncovered in military operations in 1864–5, was equally poorly documented, and finds were subsequently lost through bombing in 1941. Once again, however, there were recorded finds of fragmentary bronze mirrors and other personal ornaments, including the further pair of disc-footed brooches, suggesting a long period of use or re-use.

The cist-graves of the Isles of Scilly, though structurally different, are clearly related to the mainland series. Ashbee's excavation at Porth Cressa on the island of St Mary's (Ashbee, 1954) uncovered a small group of ten cists that he divided into two types, type I being smaller and ovoid in plan, type II being

larger and more rectangular. Their drystone construction involved the use of large boulders piled in a couple of courses with infilling of smaller stones or clay in the interstices. The mode of interment, where very poor skeletal preservation permitted its determination, was crouched inhumation with head to the north. Grave-goods were few, principally several brooches and a couple of pottery vessels of first-century AD date. Ashbee speculated whether the two grave types reflected social or gender distinctions, or whether the larger graves may have been to accommodate double burials, evidence of which had not survived. Subsequently another cemetery was located nearby at Poynter's Garden, St Mary's (Dudley, 1961), prompting Ashbee (1979) to review the accumulating evidence for the late, para-Roman date of the series, suggesting that the tradition could have been brought to the Scillies from the mainland by refugees from the Roman occupation.

Most remarkable of the cist-burials from the Isles of Scilly because of the unprecedented elaboration of its grave-goods is the more recent discovery from Bryher (Johns, 2003), the smallest of the inhabited islands of the archipelago. The ovoid cist, built of boulders with large bolster capstones, contained a crouched inhumation with head to the north. The individual was around 25 years of age, but, because of the poor state of skeletal preservation, sex could not be determined. This was especially unfortunate, since the grave-goods included a unique combination of sword and mirror, each commonly regarded as diagnostic of male and female burials respectively. A belt ring and fittings from a hide-shaped shield would be consistent with the expectations of a warrior burial, while a brooch and spiral ring might conventionally be compatible with a female assemblage. The excavator considered the possibility that the cist had contained a double inhumation, as was the case in the burial with mirror handle at West Bay, Bridport (Farrar, 1956), but if so the second would necessarily have been above the first, as the cist was not wide enough for two bodies side by side, and the total absence of any skeletal remains or evidence for sequential deposition militates against this possibility. It may be simply that the gender associations of both these artefacts were not immutable, and the role of mirrors especially has lately come under critical review (Joy, 2010, 2011). A radiocarbon date from a bone sample calibrated to 200–45 BC (OxA-12095), with the burial most probably, on the basis of associated finds, being within the latter half of that bracket. The sword scabbard with its decorated chape-plate belongs within a series of British scabbards that date from the later second and early first centuries BC, which, even allowing for the fact that it may have been old when buried, suggests that the mirror was among the earliest of the decorated bronze mirrors of southern Britain. It also suggests that the south-western peninsula and Scillies may not have been the cultural backwater in the later pre-Roman Iron Age that the older conventional view implied. A few metres to the south-east a second cist

was exposed but not excavated, which raises the possibility that the sword and mirror burial was part of a small cemetery which geophysical survey was unable to detect.

### DUROTRIGAN INHUMATION CEMETERIES IN SOUTHERN DORSET

Inhumation burials, generally of a single individual in crouched or flexed posture, either in a shallow pit grave or more rarely in a stone-lined cist, appear late in the pre-Roman Iron Age in southern Dorset in a distribution that is almost exclusively south of the river Frome, extending from Purbeck in the east to Lyme Bay in the west (Fig. 3.17). The appropriateness of the term Durotrigan might be challenged on the grounds that this limited distribution hardly equates to the territory of the Durotriges, as it might be inferred from the distributions of coins or of pottery attributed to the Durotriges. It nevertheless lies within it, perhaps representing a sub-sept of the Durotriges, so that the term will be retained here for convenience.

A second key issue is that of dating. Dorset is largely devoid of archaeological evidence for the disposal of the dead up to the latest pre-Roman Iron Age, when crouched inhumation in small groups or in larger cemeteries makes

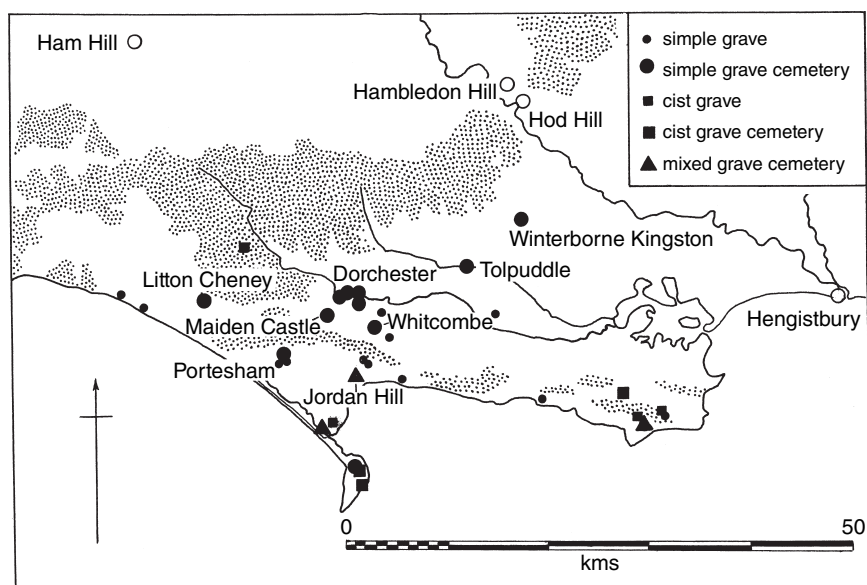


Fig. 3.17 Map of Durotrigan cemeteries in southern Dorset. Drawing by D. W. Harding.



its appearance. What prompted this change is unclear, but it happened before the conquest, though several of the cemeteries that came into existence in the earlier first century AD continued in use into the second century. There is a concentration in and around Dorchester, which Sharples (1990) linked to a shift in settlement away from the hillfort centre at Maiden Castle in the late pre-Roman Iron Age and to the appearance of new smaller settlements that signalled an apparent change in social organization. If this indeed prompted the adoption of a different funerary practice, it implies that hillforts may have previously exercised a key role in the disposal of the dead. Further, it might explain why Durotrigan cemeteries do not occur further north, where Hod Hill was still occupied and doubtless locally dominant up to the time of the conquest.

Durotrigan cemeteries include both cist-graves and shallow pit graves similar to those considered earlier. The diagnostic feature, of course, is that these burials are distinguished by having grave-goods, principal among which are pottery vessels such as bead-rim bowls and other characteristic Durotrigan types of the early-mid first century AD (Brailsford, 1958). The Maiden Castle cemeteries, both the Durotrigan cemetery and the 'war cemetery', included grave-goods in around half of their graves, generally not more than a single item, and that commonly a bead-rim bowl of Brailsford's type 1. Grave-goods nevertheless are relatively sparse, which makes the Whitcombe warrior burial (Aitken and Aitken, 1990) and the mirror grave from Portesham (Fitzpatrick, 1996) notable exceptions in the Durotrigan series.

In terms of posture the preference was for skeletons to rest on their right sides in a crouched or flexed posture, a convention that is broadly reflected at major cemeteries such as Whitcombe and Pins Knoll, Litton Cheney. Durotrigan convention appears to have favoured an orientation between north-east and south-east (Whimster, 1981: fig. 20). The Maiden Castle war cemetery broadly reflects this preference, despite some evidence of improvisation. Wheeler's impression of haste and lack of order was presumably based on the fact that, rather than conforming to the normal crouched or flexed position, several of the skeletons were lying in a twisted or contorted posture, on the back or even extended, with rather more on the left side than the right. Furthermore, there was a greater than normal number of double burials, perhaps reflecting a relationship between the individuals, but again from their disposition suggesting improvisation in haste. As for 'those tributes of food and drink which were the proper and traditional perquisites of the dead' (Wheeler, 1943: 62-3), however, fewer than half of the burials had evidence of joints of meat or vessels that might have contained drink. In sum, allowing for a touch of hyperbole, Wheeler's conclusions seem justified, despite more recent attempts to deconstruct the traditional interpretation of the war cemetery.

Whitcombe (Aitken and Aitken, 1990), less than 4 kilometres east of Maiden Castle, yielded just a dozen crouched inhumations, though the full extent of the cemetery was not definitively established by excavation. The fact that the warrior burial, grave 9, was on the south-western edge of the cemetery might suggest the existence of more graves beyond this, particularly if it served as a focal burial. The graves were mainly oval pits, just adequate to accommodate the crouched burial, with inhumations neatly laid on their right sides or on their backs with legs flexed to the right. Orientation of the head was with one exception within the north-east to south-east range. All had accompanying grave-goods except two that had been disturbed. Most included offerings of food, pig in the case of female graves and lamb in the male graves. In addition to these burials the remains of eight neonatal skeletons were recovered from various contexts, though only two were apparently in a shallow grave adjacent to burial 4, and therefore possibly a formal part of the cemetery. The presence of ditches, gullies, and pits suggested the proximity of settlement, though not demonstrably contemporary.

In west Dorset the six burials recovered at Pins Knoll, Litton Cheney (Bailey, 1967), were almost certainly part of a larger Durotrigan cemetery. The burials were all in simple graves, and comprised flexed inhumations oriented to the north or to the east facing north. Two adult females lacked any grave-goods and only two graves contained pottery vessels of characteristic Durotrigan type. Grave B, of a male teenager, nevertheless had a set of twenty counters and an iron stylus, objects that might imply scholarly or divining powers. The largest assemblage was assigned to the youngest, a child of 5 or thereabouts in grave F, who was accompanied by a pedestalled bowl, a bronze penannular brooch, a bronze bracelet with ring attached, a hinged brooch, and a fragment of an iron pin. The Litton Cheney assemblage certainly challenges simplistic interpretation of grave-goods as reflecting the status of the dead.

Other instances of Durotrigan burials that may have originated in the pre-conquest period but where the majority of the graves belong to the Romano-British period have been revealed by excavation in advance of development in and around Dorchester. Among these Flagstones (Woodward and Smith, 1988; Smith et al., 1997), Alington Avenue (Davies et al., 2002), and Poundbury (Farwell and Mollison, 1993) all appear to have had Durotrigan burials in the immediately pre-conquest period, at Alington Avenue continuing in modified form into the late third century. The site at Tolpuddle Ball (Hearne and Birbeck, 1999) is rather more puzzling, in view of its appearance as a small farmstead enclosure with 'antenna' ditch leading from its entrance. The only evidence for internal features was a series of pits, in several of which are burials of middle to late pre-Roman Iron Age date, including both adults and neonatal skeletons. Others contain animal skulls or artefactual remains that look like structured deposits, so that, whatever other functions

the site may have served, it evidently included the burial of the dead. The six-post structure just outside the enclosure to the north-east could be interpreted as having a mortuary function. The relatively small number of inhumations includes simple graves, some with associated grave-goods of pottery and one with a brooch of first-century AD date, and burials in pits and ditch filling that would not normally qualify as part of a formal cemetery. Most recently excavated is the banjo enclosure at Winterborne Kingston (Cheetham et al., 2013), where the formal Durotrigan cemetery of the first century AD was preceded by crouched inhumations with grave-goods dating from around 100 BC.

A novel disposition of graves was displayed by the Durotrigan cemetery at Manor Farm, Portesham (Valentin, 2003), 7 kilometres south-west of Maiden Castle, where six inhumation burials that were probably only part of a larger cemetery appeared to be arranged in pairs. Four of the graves contained distinctive Durotrigan pottery, including black burnished bowls and bead-rim jars comparable to the Maiden Castle war cemetery, while one, still retaining some Durotrigan features, was probably early second century in date and the sixth was certainly Romano-British. All four first-century Durotrigan burials were crouched inhumations in simple oval or sub-rectangular graves with head broadly to the north. One pair in particular was rather better furnished than most Durotrigan graves. Grave 502, of a young adult female, had two local Durotrigan pots together with two south Gaulish and early central Gaulish samian vessels as well as a brooch of the second half of the first century AD. Her accompaniments also included quantities of animal remains, some articulated, that were remarkable not just because sheep, cattle, pig, horse, and dog were all represented, but because they had been placed vertically around the skull. Grave 527, a female in her teens, was also well equipped with paired local and imported vessels, this time a bead-rim jar and an imported Armorican bowl, both capped with samian platters. She also had a pair of brooches looped together, which, like the Armorican bowl, could have been old when buried in the later first century. On the basis of skeletal analysis, it was suggested that these two individuals may have been related, which raises a novel consideration in view of the fact that all six were arranged in pairs. Graves 94 and 133 lay immediately to the west of a circular structure some 6 metres in diameter with limestone kerb footings and an entrance to the east, which had evidently been built around the time of the conquest, but which continued in use throughout the Romano-British occupation, and conceivably into the sub-Roman period. The excavator inferred a domestic function, but did not exclude the possibility that it had served as a shrine. Apart from some internal postholes its only features were two large pits that were surely too large to have been structural, but which were not obviously for votive deposits. Nevertheless, the longevity of use of this structure argues against a simple domestic function, and it seems more probable that it served a role in the funerary process.

These cemeteries comprise essentially simple graves, though they have distinctive Durotrigan material associations and a particular preference in orientation. Within the Durotrigan tradition, however, there are some cemeteries that are made up of cist-graves, sometimes no more than a single slab on either side, notably in the eastern district of Purbeck and in the coastal southern districts of Portland and Weymouth. Unfortunately, most of the known sites were nineteenth-century discoveries that were not well recorded. From the major cemetery at Jordan Hill, Weymouth, it is clear that many of the eighty inhumations that were found to the north-east of a Romano-British temple site were themselves of late first- and second-century AD date, but the presence of Durotrigan pottery certainly suggests that the cemetery may have originated in the pre-conquest Iron Age. The same applies to other early finds from the area, including cist cemeteries from the Verne (RCHM, 1970a: 605) and the Grove (RCHM, 1970a: 606–7) on Portland and Wyke reservoir, Weymouth (RCHM, 1970a: 617). Handles of bronze mirrors from the Verne, and another, possibly from the Grove, suggest the possibility of mirror burials like that more recently excavated at Portesham (Fitzpatrick, 1996), which, though not itself a cist-grave, was from a district where undated cist-graves have previously been recorded. The cist-graves from the Isle of Purbeck, from Corfe Castle (RCHM, 1970a: 599) and Langton Matravers (RCHM, 1970a: 602), are likewise old finds with inadequate records, though the Gallowes Gore West cemetery from Worth Matravers (RCHM, 1970a: 620–1) appears to have had early first-century AD associations for its combination of simple and cist-graves. Cist-graves of Romano-British date may be distinguished by their associated grave-goods, if reliably recorded, and by their adoption of the rite of extended inhumation, but the cist-grave tradition appears to have its roots in the late pre-Roman Durotrigan manner of cemetery inhumation.

#### LATER PRE-ROMAN IRON AGE CREMATION CEMETERIES IN SOUTH-EASTERN BRITAIN

The cremation cemeteries in south-eastern England have been recognized as a distinctive feature of the late pre-Roman Iron Age since the publication by (Sir Arthur) Evans (1890) of the cemetery at Aylesford in Kent, which became the type-site for the series, together with Swarling in Kent (Bushe-Fox, 1925). Following Hawkes and Dunning's (1930) seminal paper on the Belgae of Gaul and Britain, which linked the Aylesford series to cremation cemeteries in Belgic Gaul, this phenomenon was equated with successive waves of settlement of south-eastern England by continental Belgae in the earlier first century BC inferred from Caesar's record (*DBG*, V, 12) of Belgic migrations.

Problems arose with Birchall's (1965) study of the Aylesford-Swarling culture, because of the difficulty of assigning any of the 'Belgic' ceramic material from cremation cemeteries to a pre-Caesar horizon, still less with early Gallo-Belgic coins, which Allen's (1961) work had indicated should have their origins in the second century. With the demise of diffusionism as an explanation of culture change, the Belgae no longer featured prominently in archaeological interpretations of the social and cultural changes that are evident in the late pre-Roman Iron Age in south-eastern and southern England. Nevertheless, the legacy of the Aylesford-Swarling culture survives in the tacit assumption that the funerary evidence represents a consistent pattern of innovation, as if it had been the result of introduction by an innovating group, rather than the cumulative product of diverse cross-channel connections in the late pre-Roman period.

The adoption of cremation in south-eastern England was certainly a significant innovation, though inhumation was not universally superseded. Even among cremations, practice was by no means uniform. At King Harry Lane the majority of cremated remains, dating to the period AD 1–60, were contained within pottery vessels, whereas at Westhampnett (Fitzpatrick, 1997), dating from the first half of the first century BC, they were not. Even where pottery vessels are present, the cremated remains are not necessarily contained within them, but may be simply deposited on the floor of the grave with no apparent container, though a textile bag or wrapping might not survive archaeologically. The pottery urn is commonly a pedestal vase, as at Aylesford and Swarling, but other forms are not excluded, including bowls and butt-beakers that represent the range of normal domestic ceramics. In some more lavishly furnished graves the cremated remains may be contained within a metal-bound wooden bucket or tankard, or even within a bronze cauldron. Whatever the distinction, it is not simply a matter of status, since in some of the richly furnished graves like those from Stanway (Crummy et al., 2007) the cremated remains were not contained within a vessel, while at Biddenham Loop (Luke, 2008) the two unurned burials likewise included an impressively well-furnished grave.

The greatest variation, however, and one that demands explanation in terms of demographic representation, is in the number of graves recorded. Most cemeteries are very small, with perhaps less than a dozen burials, though often it is not possible for practical reasons to determine their full extent. Only Westhampnett and King Harry Lane at present are known to have more than thirty burials, and both of a scale order significantly greater than that, with 161 at Westhampnett and at King Harry Lane some 455 cremations and 17 inhumations.

Westhampnett (Fig. 2.2; Fitzpatrick, 1997) was also one of the earliest of the cremation cemeteries yet excavated in southern England. The important associated evidence for mortuary structures and pyres has already been considered. The burials were in simple pits, mostly circular around half a metre in

diameter. Few of the cremated remains were in urns, but the compact deposits suggested the possibility of organic containers or wrappings. The quantity of cremated bone in the burial was often quite small, and other material from the pyre such as animal bone and brooches was also included. Pottery vessels were included in 90 per cent of the graves, and the disposition of the various components within the larger pits sometimes left room for organic items that have not survived. The grave inventories enabled the excavator to make the important distinction between grave-goods and pyre-goods, a distinction that plainly impacts upon any assessment of the role of such accompaniments.

Even those burials that had not suffered some form of truncation often contained only a small percentage of the estimated total of bone resulting from cremation, lower than the average from some contemporary cemeteries elsewhere. This must raise the question whether only a token residue was considered necessary for formal burial, or whether other samples were selectively removed for deposit elsewhere, perhaps in familiar settlement contexts, where they might not impact so readily on the archaeological record. Instances of burials in which the quantity of cremated human bone was less than 10 grams prompted the suggestion (McKinley in Fitzpatrick, 1997: 57) that these might be distinguished as 'memorials' (recognizing of course that all burials may be regarded in some sense as memorials), on analogy with the identification of certain later pre-Roman Iron Age cremation burials in France as 'cenotaphs' (Flouest, 1993: 204).

For the majority of burials, a single individual appears to have been involved. Two certain instances were identified of dual cremations (that is, of two individuals cremated on the same pyre, as opposed to double burials of separate cremations in the same grave) both involving adults with an infant or juvenile. Although infants were not totally absent, the percentage of infants and juveniles was lower than might statistically have been expected. Attribution to sex was generally inconclusive. One aspect of the distribution of graves was significant, namely that a majority of mature adults were buried in an arc around the circular, open area to the north-west of the cemetery complex, which the excavator believed may have formed some kind of focus for ritual activity. There was also some evidence that the inclusion of pyre-goods and grave-goods favoured adults and elders. The only other indication of discrimination was in what the excavator termed 'focal' graves, which were distinguished either by being somewhat larger or by being physically segregated, or by having a greater number of associated artefacts.

By comparison, the difference in layout of the cemetery at King Harry Lane could not be more striking (Fig. 3.18). From the outset, in pre-Roman phase one, a key element was the arrangement of rectilinear ditched enclosures aligned broadly parallel to each other with a 5 metre 'corridor' between them. Each seemed to focus upon a prominent, generally central grave, around which other satellite graves clustered, so that the excavator was disposed

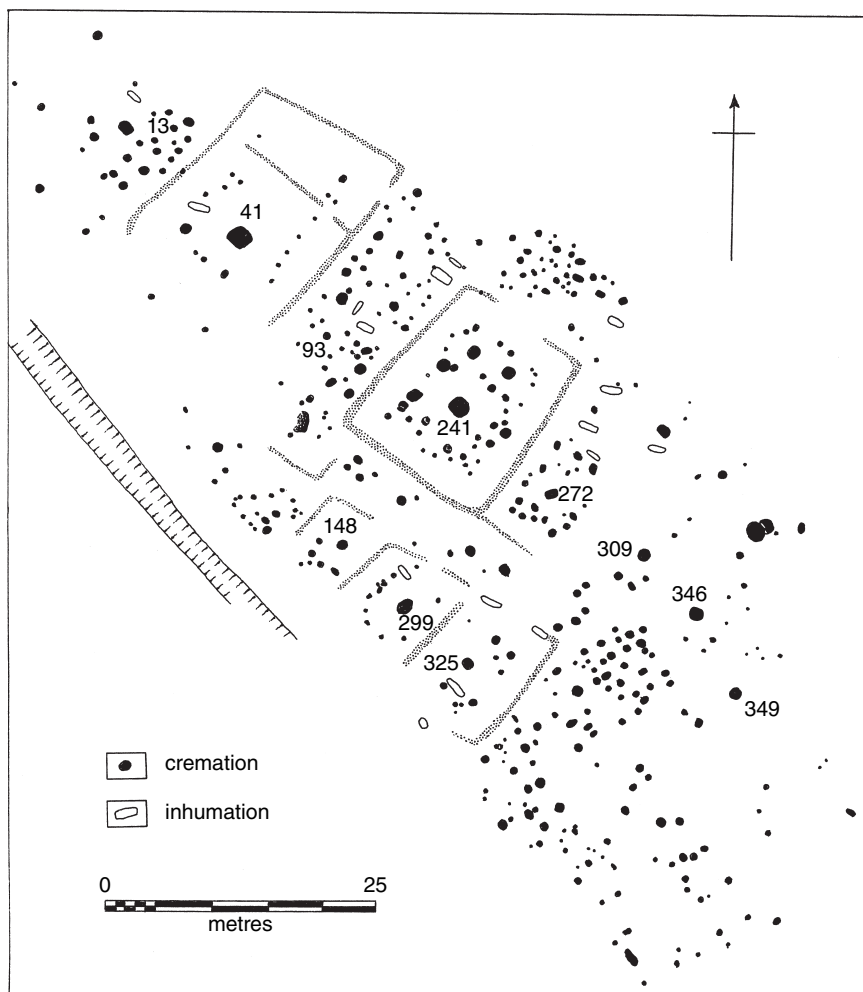


Fig. 3.18 King Harry Lane, Verulamium, cemetery plan. Drawing adapted from Stead and Rigby, 1989.

to adopt Evans's designation from Aylesford of these as 'family' groups. This inference had not been tested by osteological or genetic analysis, of course, any more than had the remains from Aylesford, and it was challenged by Fitzpatrick (1991), who pointed out that the ratios of adult to pre-adult (6:1) and male to female (3:1) in these groups were incompatible with their interpretation as normal family groups, though they might result from an artificially created settlement. In a subsequent analysis, Millett (1993) identified fifteen clusters within the King Harry Lane cemetery, including both enclosed and unenclosed clusters from the outset, which survived through the cemetery's four successive chronological phases. He suggested that these might

mirror the polyfocal organization of the early *oppidum* settlement and in consequence each might be attributed to a different social group. The exception was his cluster G, which increased in size over time, and, assuming that it did correspond to a coherent grouping, it might therefore be socially less exclusive (ibid. 259–60).

The ‘focal’ graves in this instance, as at Westhampnett, could be larger and could contain more accompanying goods. A hundred and ninety-two cremations were in urns, while a third or more of the graves had accessory vessels. Among the earlier graves were imports of late Augustan southern Gaulish and Italian wares, indicating a measure of economic status for the ‘focal’ graves at least. Fitzpatrick (1991) pointed out that nearly twice as many unurned burials contained imports as those with cremations in urns, a statistic that has no obvious explanation. Apart from pottery, by far the most prolific of grave-goods were brooches, with 237 in all. Other than knives and mirrors, other types occurred in insignificant numbers. Most obvious of all for their absence were swords or any other weapons, even from indisputably pre-Roman graves. There is no obvious segregation of the inhumation burials from cremations at King Harry Lane. The seventeen recorded examples of inhumations occur both in and around the cremation enclosures, and broadly the orientation of the grave pits follows the north-west/south-east alignment of the enclosures. Clearly cremation was not an exclusive even if it was the dominant rite, nor seemingly was there any embargo upon cremations and inhumations sharing their final resting-places.

As with Westhampnett, the collecting of cremated remains for final interment seems to have been selective. Some of the burials were reasonably complete, but 105 produced less than 250 grams of cremated bone (Stirland, 1989), which suggests that only a token quantity was required for burial, or that the residue was assigned to some other purpose that is not attested archaeologically. One reason why this pattern could be important is because it suggests the possibility that, whatever were the previous practices that left so little tangible evidence in the archaeological record, they may not have been altogether superseded by the introduction of the cremation rite. In effect, there may have been more than one way in which the dead were ultimately disposed of, even in the later pre-Roman Iron Age.

One of the few instances where a cemetery was located in close proximity to the settlement that it may be presumed to have served was that which lay just north-west of farmstead 6/8 at Biddenham Loop (Luke, 2008). Cemetery L39 comprised just sixteen graves, a dozen compressed within a confined area with three larger graves set slightly further to the north, north-west, and west. These three were not only the most generously furnished in material goods, they also were the only graves to have accompanying joints of pork, a meat that was otherwise relatively scarce from the settlement sites. The sixteenth grave (S356), also offset to the north, was possibly the earliest, having a pre-conquest brooch,



and also a toiletry set, as did one of the other richer assemblages. Toilet equipment, as Hill (1997) has shown, becomes more common in settlement assemblages as well as in graves in the late pre-conquest period, and must signify a shift in concerns regarding personal appearance and hygiene. Whether it reflects increasing 'Romanization', as might the adoption of Roman tableware and hence presumably diet, or whether there was some inherent increase in concerns of personal appearance and identity, remains a matter of debate. The use of the cemetery apparently continued here as elsewhere into the early post-conquest period, but the Biddenham graves never acquired any imported ceramics. Nevertheless, proximity to the contemporary settlement allowed the excavators to make comparison between their assemblages, and it was evident that *tazze* and pedestal vases in particular were only found in the cemetery.

A diversity of practice is certainly implied by the evidence from Hinxtion Rings, Cambridgeshire (Fig. 3.19; Hill et al., 1999), where the mortuary rite included both cremation and inhumation, and where five out of eight cremation burials were surrounded by a ring-ditch that probably resulted in a small marker mound over the central interments. None of the cremations was contained in an urn, but the remains appeared to have been sorted carefully from the funerary pyre. Most were of adults, with just one juvenile, but two had an admixture of immature bone fragments suggesting that there had been more than one body on the pyre. The two largest ring-ditches, 1 and 2, were also the best endowed in terms of grave-goods, and these were considered as potentially 'founding burials' around which the other 'satellites' had been added (ibid. 264). Cremation 1 was distinguished by having no less than nine pottery vessels, including two pedestal jars and four *tazze*, all dating to the first century BC. Cremation 2 by contrast had only two pots, but no less than ten items of metalwork, mostly personal items, including four iron brooches with tweezers and nail-cleaners, raising questions regarding the relative status of the two assemblages. Only cremations 1 and 2 had meat offerings included in the grave. The unenclosed cremations, 6, 7, and 8, were also the least well endowed in terms of grave-goods, having just one pot each and little else. Even so, with such a small overall sample, the correlation between the presence and size of ring-ditch and wealth of grave-goods was considered to be no more than a 'propensity' (ibid. 250) rather than demonstrated. None of the pottery from the Hinxtion burials included any of the later pre-Roman types, such as platters, beakers, flagons, or Gallo-Belgic imports, though one of the inhumation burials was wearing an early Roman finger-ring. Ring-ditch cremations are not widely recorded among late pre-Roman Iron Age burials, but the Hinxtion site simply re-affirms the diversity of the Aylesford phenomenon.

We have seen that the associated assemblage of graves within cemeteries is variable, and may include some relatively richly furnished graves that may have played a 'focal' role in the cemetery layout. In addition, notably north of the Thames, there was a series of individual tombs with a much more lavish set

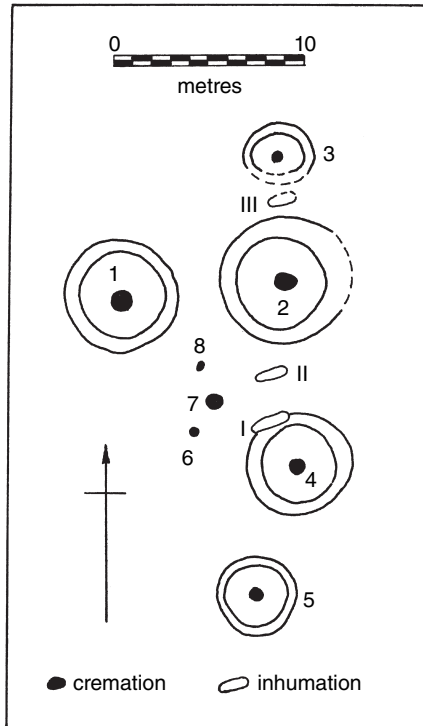


Fig. 3.19 Hinxton, Cambridgeshire, cemetery plan. Drawing adapted from Hill et al., 1999.

of grave furnishings and accompaniments that were designated 'Welwyn type' burials by Stead, most of which date to the later pre-conquest period. These, together with other distinctive tombs, will be considered in a later chapter.

## CONCLUSIONS

Despite a significant increase in the data-base for Iron Age burials in recent years, there still remains a profound gulf between those regions in which there was a convention of burial in segregated cemeteries, for however limited a period of time, and the rest of Britain for which the archaeological record of burial is extremely fragmentary. Nevertheless, it is increasingly clear that burial customs within the distribution of Yorkshire square-ditched barrow cemeteries and Aylesford-Swarling cremation cemeteries were more varied than has generally been recognized, and that both traditions may have been combined with other funerary rites shared in common with regions where formal burial in cemeteries was not conventionally practised.

Elsewhere small burial grounds have been located, sometimes in close proximity to hillforts and settlements, though their spacing apart or disposition in separated clusters suggests organic growth, perhaps of small family or kin groups, rather than ordering within a formal cemetery. The relationship of burials to settlements is plainly crucial, and will be the subject of another chapter.

## Dead among the living landscape

The discovery of human remains in both hillforts and settlements has a long archaeological history, whether whole or partial skeletons or simply individual bones and fragments, though the former were often dismissed as the atypical disposal of social outcasts or malefactors, and the latter were never satisfactorily explained as casual discards. The fact that complete or near-complete skeletons were found in pits that evidently had been designed for another purpose, together with the absence of grave-goods, militated against their interpretation as formal burials, and set these apart from those grouped burials in pits that we have treated as small cemeteries. As regards fragmentary remains, the idea that the dead were exposed for excarnation, possibly over a protracted period of time, is now well established in Iron Age studies. What happened after excarnation is less clear, whether the skeleton was re-assembled and buried, either in a formal cemetery or in a settlement context, or distributed as body parts or individual bones in pits, ditches, entrances, or other locations around settlements. Alternatively, in ethnographic contexts it is not unknown for the dead to be interred in a temporary burial ground for a period of months or even years, whilst the process of decomposition took place, before exhumation and re-burial following a final funerary feast. That final stage of re-interment in the British Iron Age likewise could have involved complete or near-complete re-burial, or separation of body parts and their distribution into liminal locations, as a means of incorporating the benign dead into the living community. And hillforts might well have served as the location, not only for excarnation platforms, but for temporary burial as well. We should not, however, exclude other possible interpretations. As Duday (2006: 30) warned, ‘one must not presuppose a funerary context of all such deposits because certain intentional deposits of human remains have nothing to do with burial’.

Necessarily, of course, researchers are dependent upon the quantity as well as the quality of the excavated data-base, particularly in terms of statistical assessments, and for this reason Danebury has tended to dominate recent studies. Woodward had argued (1993: 4 and table 1.2) that skulls represented a higher proportion of the human remains from settlements

than they did from hillfort assemblages, but we should be wary of sampling practice from older excavations, where skulls were more likely to have been retrieved than miscellaneous fragments of human bone. Redfern's assessment of material from Dorset suggested that skulls were 'more frequently found in hillforts, whereas limb bones are more common on domestic sites' (2008b: 294). Accordingly, hillforts and non-hillfort settlements will be reviewed separately, since the two sets of data need not necessarily reflect identical practices.

## HILLFORT BURIALS

The diversity of the evidence is well represented at Danebury. Here, human remains were recovered from 181 pits, a significant number, but, allowing for the time-span involved, representing only a small minority of the population that was served by the hillfort. Cunliffe offered a variety of explanations for these burials, ranging from massacres to cannibalism, ritual sacrifice, and dismemberment, but for those that showed no obvious sign of traumatic injury, deposition after excarnation, resulting in fragmentation of the remains, was the most widely favoured. Nevertheless, he repeatedly asserted that pit burial could not be regarded as a normal method of disposing of the dead. In the absence of an archaeologically visible regular and recurrent burial rite for much of the British Iron Age, we should hardly dismiss as abnormal what evidence is available, simply because it fails to conform to our preconception of normal burial.

Six categories of human remains could be identified at Danebury (Craig et al., 2005), some of which displayed traumatic injuries that were evidently inflicted at or around the time of death:

- whole skeletons
- incomplete skeletons
- articulated body parts
- skulls and frontal bones
- pelvic girdles
- individual bones.

These deposits were not restricted to pits, but were also found in ditches and postholes, or simply in stratified contexts around the site, but pit burial constituted a significant proportion of the recorded finds. An argument for not regarding the Danebury pit burials as representative of normal disposal of the dead was that adolescents were over-represented in the sample, while a higher male to female ratio was also incompatible with a cross-section of the population. This, as we noted earlier, presumes that any 'normal' burial rite

should be demographically representative, when there may have been different conventions for different sections of society, and not necessarily ones such as kin groups that would be expected to have a normal age or gender spectrum.

If burial in pits was secondary and opportunistic, the pits having served an unrelated previous purpose, such as grain storage or as cold cellars for meat, then the implication must be either that a pit could have been made available to coincide with the occasion of a death, or that the body was curated for a while until a pit could be opened. Either is possible, of course, since the contents of a pit would have been transferred *en bloc* to an upstanding granary or to storage jars within houses to make them accessible, a process that could have begun at any time from autumn through winter and into spring, as stored grain was progressively drawn upon. Nevertheless, it is hard to resist the probability that burial of human remains in pits *was* related to their primary purpose for storage of produce, and hence involving rituals dedicated to ensuring the fertility of crops. Whether the dead was a sacrificial victim or re-deposited remains chosen for such special rites would be hard to judge archaeologically unless the skeleton displayed unusual trauma. Alternative uses of pits as latrines or for disposal of domestic waste (Lambrick, 2009: 286) should not be discounted, but would hardly account for the numbers within a hillfort like Danebury, and should surely be indicated by the nature of their fillings.

Among more recent hillfort excavations limited trenching at Castle Hill, Little Wittenham (Allen et al., 2010), uncovered a scatter of middle Iron Age pits, several of which contained articulated, disarticulated, or fragmentary human bones. Pit 3152 in trench 3 was notable for containing a sequence of human remains, a crouched adult male inhumation at the bottom, four partially articulated parts of an adult female above that, and a neonatal skeleton that had been inserted into the upper filling in the late pre-Roman or early Roman period. It was the condition of the intermediate remains that was unusual, however, in having cut marks that suggested deliberate dismemberment not long after death, and before the natural sequence of decomposition had begun (Hacking et al., 2010: 79). A cattle skull had been placed nearby, and a sheep skull was in the filling above. The sequence of broadly level deposits certainly argued for this as a carefully ordered process, though it was impossible to be certain that the later, neonatal burial, clearly intrusive stratigraphically, had been part of the same process.

The ritual role of hillforts is reflected retrospectively in the case of Maiden Castle, Dorset, by the establishment there in the late Roman period of a Romano-Celtic temple of characteristic square-within-a-square plan. Wheeler's excavated Area B (Fig. 4.1) showed that the Roman building overlay Iron Age pits, several of which contained deposits which would now be regarded as 'structured'. One, B42, contained the skull and incomplete skeleton of an adult female; two others were much smaller, containing infant burials that looked

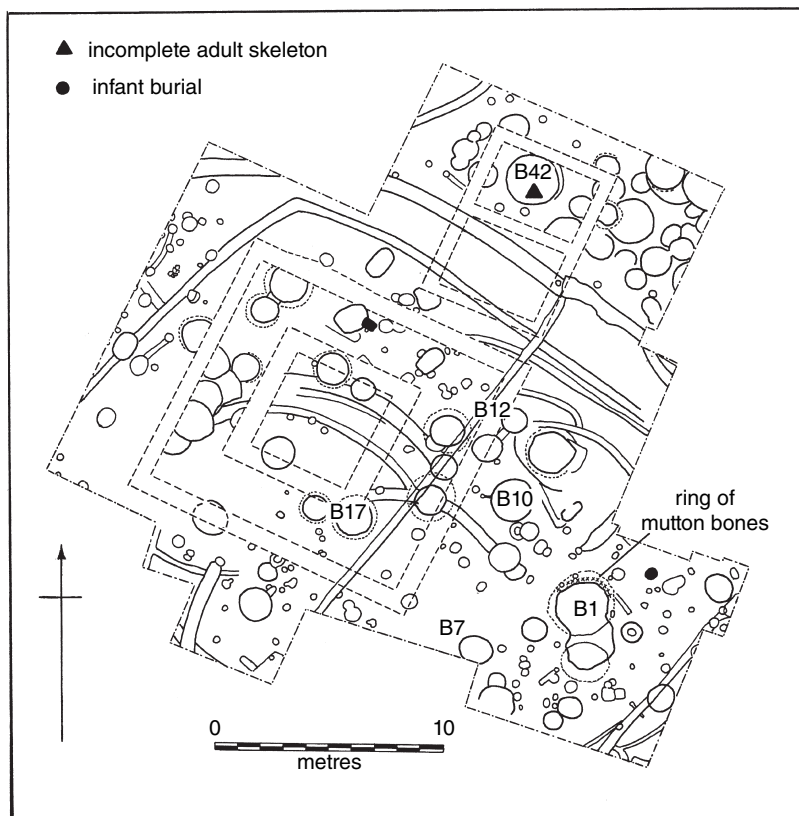


Fig. 4.1 Maiden Castle, Dorset, Site B plan. Drawing adapted from Wheeler, 1943.

more like dedicated graves. Other pits contained artefactual deposits that were surely deliberate, like B12 with 4,000 sling-stones (Wheeler, 1943: 91, assigned to B10 on p. 54), B7 with fewer sling-stones, and B17 containing seven loom-weights. The ring of mutton bones from B1 will be considered later. Whilst the structural remains, pits, gullies, and four- or six-posters, were standard domestic types, it seems probable that some of these special deposits, including burials, were the result of associated ritual activities.

The occurrence of fragmented bones from the Broxmouth hillfort revealed a striking contrast with remains from the formal cemetery, a significant proportion of the fragmentary remains showing signs of physical trauma in the shape of peri-mortem fractures or cut marks. Radiocarbon dates showed that these fragments were not the product of a single violent episode, but occurred from various periods throughout the site sequence. Stable isotope analysis further suggested that these individuals were not from the same population as was represented in the formal cemetery and in the isolated graves in the

hillfort interior, leading to the conclusion that they represented 'human trophies taken from outsiders killed in violent conflict' (Armit et al., 2013: 93; reiterated in Armit and McKenzie, 2013: 428).

The most conspicuous examples of human remains buried in hillfort ditches are those of supposed massacres like Sutton Walls, Herefordshire, and more recently Fin Cop, Derbyshire, which will be considered later. Apart from these, there are notable discoveries such as the horse, rider, and dog from Blewburton Hill, Oxfordshire (formerly Berkshire) (Collins, 1953: 31). But in general excavators have devoted less time and effort to excavating hillfort ditches than they have to ramparts, the structural complexities of which attracted greater priority than ditches that were assumed to be little more than added obstacles produced by quarrying material for the rampart. Increasing interest in the social role of hillforts has in any event turned attention towards examination of hillfort interiors rather than of their defences, as exemplified most obviously at Danebury. Yet the example of causewayed enclosures of the Neolithic at Hambledon Hill, Dorset (Mercer and Healey, 2008), with their evidence from ditches of human skeletal material and the remains of ceremonial feasting, suggests that enclosure ditches may have been much more than simple boundaries or even defensive barriers, and this is plainly one area of hillfort research that urgently needs further attention. It may yet transpire that hillfort ditches, together with the area immediately beyond the defences, played a major role in the disposal of the dead.

## SETTLEMENT BURIALS IN PITS WITH GRAVE-GOODS

We have already drawn a distinction between pit burials in what appear to have been small cemeteries and burials in pit groups that had been dug for other purposes, where only occasional pits contained burials. There is, however, an intermediate category of burials that basically fall into the latter group, but which are distinguished by having associated artefacts that appear to have been included as grave-goods might be in formal burials. One such group of pit burials on the western fringes of the Wessex distribution is unusual, not only in having several burials that were accompanied by occasional grave-goods, but also in having multiple burials in a single pit. Dibble's Farm, Christon (Morris, 1988), lies at the north-western edge of the Mendip Hills on a low spur that nevertheless commands extensive views. The site was subject to salvage excavation prior to road building, and regrettably crucial site plans and records were lost. Of nearly seventy pits, some of which were unusually up to 1.40 m in depth, twenty-one contained human remains, varying from complete or near-complete skeletons to individual bones. One crouched inhumation had an iron spiral ring on the upper arm, while another



had a penannular brooch of Fowler's (1960) type Aa. One adult male inhumation was accompanied by two dogs, a relationship with animal deposits for which we shall see further evidence in due course. These associations might have suggested a formal cemetery, but the otherwise random distribution of burials in re-used pits still militates against this interpretation. Three of the Dibble's Farm pits contained three human burials in each, but there is no record of their stratigraphic relationships or associations, which is especially unfortunate since these may well have demonstrated the principles of structured deposition.

Among the Upper Thames gravel terrace settlements Gravelly Guy (Fig. 4.2; Lambrick and Allen, 2004) yielded by far the greatest number of deposits of

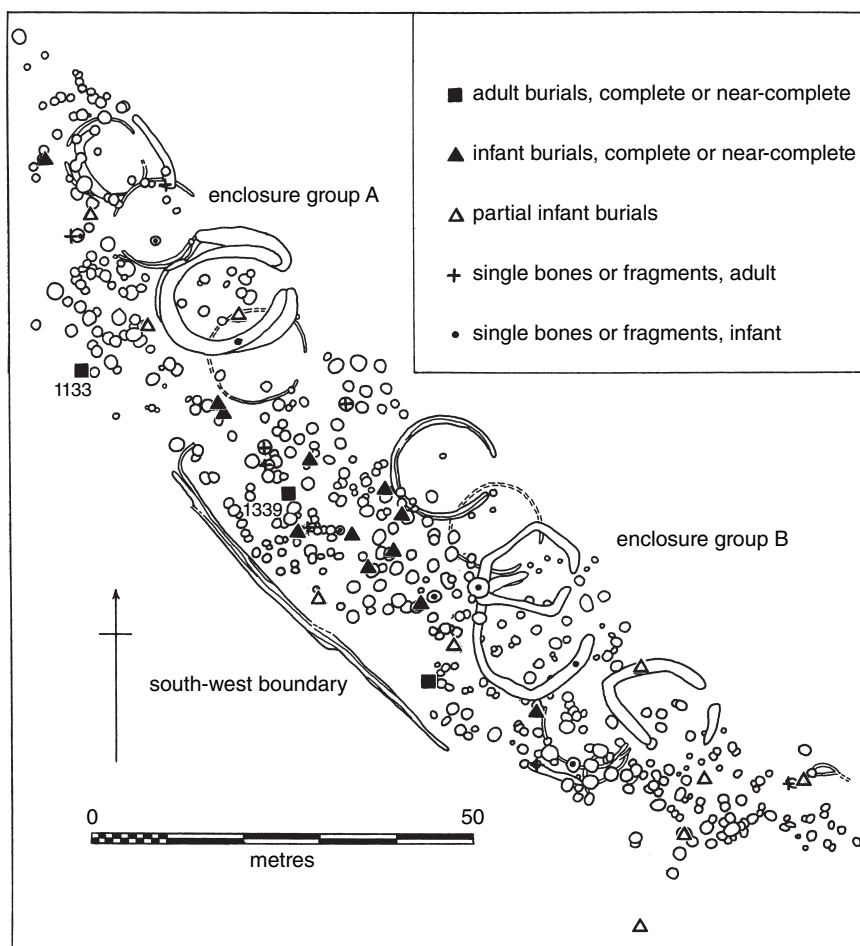


Fig. 4.2 Gravelly Guy, Oxfordshire, Block 5 settlement plan with burials. Drawing adapted from Lambrick and Allen, 2004.

human and animal remains in pits, though probably not disproportionately so in view of the sizeable area opened and the number of pits actually sampled. Shallow burial pits 1133 and 1339, both of which contained virtually complete adult crouched inhumations, included apparently associated artefacts, a shale spindle whorl and bone toggle respectively, which, if regarded as grave-goods, would again set them apart from other southern British burials in pits. Of around eighty deposits of human remains at Gravelly Guy, complete adult human burials are a small minority, while complete or partial neonatal or infant burials account for around thirty of the recorded instances (*ibid.* table 6.4). The inclusion of grave-goods was evidently a distinction enjoyed not just by adults. Pit 409 in the north-west of the main site contained a crouched inhumation of an adolescent aged 10–11 with two fragments of iron, one certainly from a brooch of probable Nauheim-derivative type of immediately pre-conquest date. Another burial, from pit 18 on the terrace edge, a disarticulated inhumation of a child aged 3–4 years, was accompanied by an iron spearhead.

Similar problems are posed by Site M at Castle Hills, Micklefield in Yorkshire (Fig. 4.3; Brown *et al.*, 2007), though this far north the primary use of the pits for storage must have been on the margins of practicality. The spread of pits with several four-post structures was aligned along the north-eastern side of a major linear boundary, at the northern and southern limits of which were single round-houses, suggesting a homestead settlement of two nuclear families. The southern round-house was separated from the grave area by a boundary gully at right angles to the main linear ditch, and it is possible from the disposition of pits at the northern end that the round-house here too was segregated from the burials by a similar fence that has been lost through severe truncation that affected the ring gullies of the house itself. The burials divided into two groups near each of the houses, so might be thought of as relating to those households. Three inhumations in the northern group were each accompanied by a brooch, presumably attached to dress or shroud, and one was wearing an iron bracelet on her left forearm, while a second had a single stone bead. All lay crouched on their left sides, but orientation was variable, so that it would be hard to describe this as a regular pattern of disposal. The five burials from the south-eastern group, also flexed, were disposed either broadly north–south or east–west, and lacked grave accompaniments, apart from two possible offerings of joints of meat. Other pits contained substantial cattle remains or articulated remains of dog. The southern group of pits was also within a few metres of a rectilinear, post-built structure (10251), roughly 6 metres square and therefore rather larger than standard four- or six-posters from which it was spatially separated, which may have served as a shrine or mortuary house linked to the site's funerary functions. Whilst the burials hardly add up to a formal cemetery, the selective nature of pit fillings suggested deliberate deposition, and the rectilinear structure may suggest funerary activity. Radiocarbon dates for the burials, though within the calibration plateau, broadly

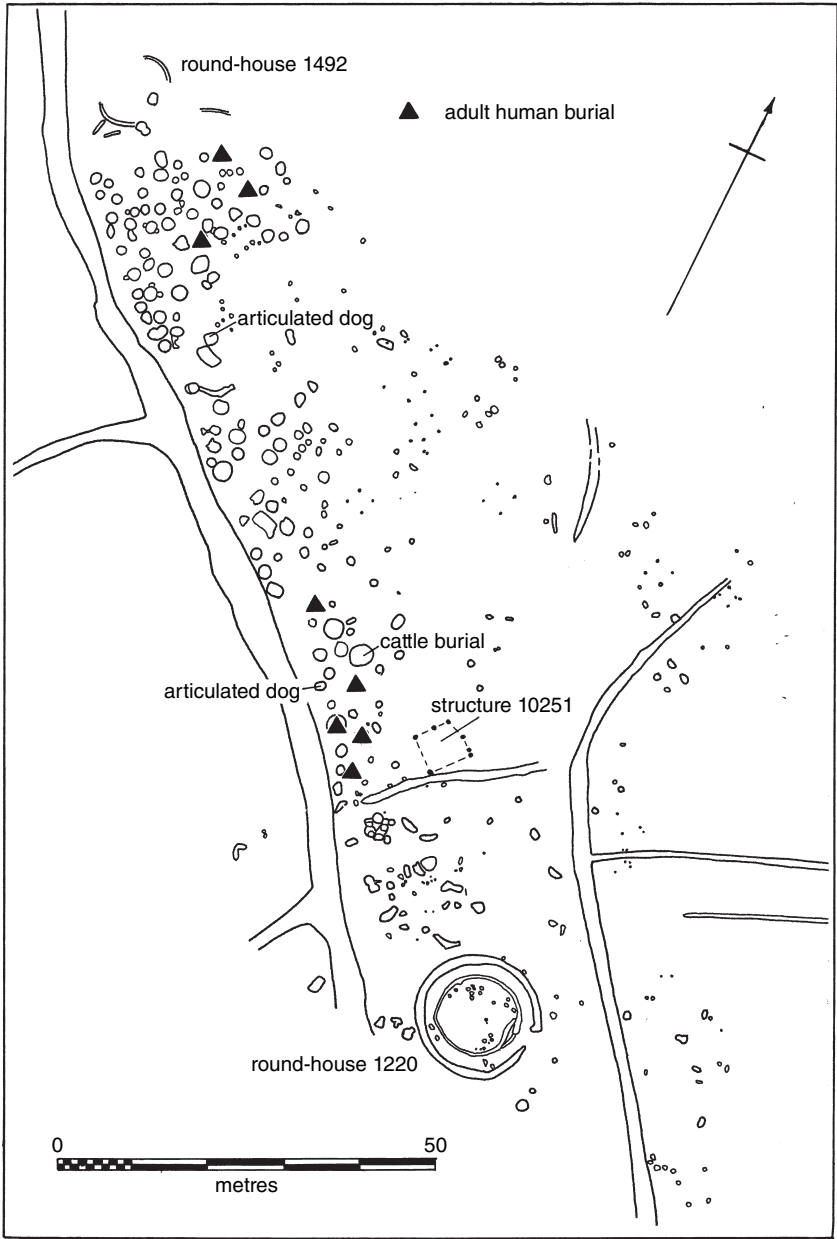


Fig. 4.3 Micklefield, Yorkshire, Site M plan. Drawing adapted from Brown et al., 2007.

confirm their later middle Iron Age date. Finally we should note that strontium isotope analysis led the excavators to believe that seven out of eight of the dead from Site M were not native to the region, raising the possibility that this might account for their special treatment in death.

If the presence of grave-goods is a measure of 'formal' burial, then evidently such burials may occur in 'informal' contexts, that is, outside dedicated cemeteries and within areas of settlement used for other purposes, a further demonstration of the diversity of insular Iron Age funerary practices.

## HUMAN REMAINS FROM NON-FORTIFIED SETTLEMENTS

### **Pits containing skeletal remains or fragments**

The concept of a 'structured deposit' may appear to be a pretentious way of saying that someone deliberately put something somewhere, but it provides an important counter-balance to 'casual' deposition, and avoids the need to explain by what agency or for what purpose objects ended up where they did. Hill's (1995) analysis of the Winnall Down pits was particularly persuasive in remarking how individual items, including human and animal remains, appeared to be accorded separate stratigraphic contexts, that is, they were each placed in the pit in a discrete deposit, ordered in sequence, rather than being thrown or falling arbitrarily within a series of tip-lines or layers resulting from the natural processes of silting of the pit. Crucial to this interpretation was the stratigraphy of the pits. Contrary to expectation of natural erosion and silting, the stratigraphy of pits 4475 and 7372 (Fig. 3.4) appeared to be virtually horizontal, supporting the view that deposits had been intentionally built up in an ordered sequence of episodes. We should nevertheless recall Bersu's observation (1940: 59) that, if the filling had been tipped in from one side of the pit, whether the stratigraphy reflects this or appears horizontal will depend upon whether the section is parallel or at right angles to the direction of tipping. In pit 4475, the adolescent male was unique among the Winnall Down burials in having grave-goods, in this case wearing a shale bracelet. Like several other burials, the skeleton was in the upper filling of the pit, as if the lower deposits, in which some animal bone and other artefacts were included, were necessary precursors to the main event. A similar pattern was observed in pit 7372, where the principal human remains were two infants in the upper filling. Lower layers, and those above the burials, contained a succession of human or animal bones and other artefacts, whereas intermediate layers were apparently devoid of artefacts, though these could of course have been of perishable materials. The impression of sequence is persuasive, corresponding presumably

to episodes in the ritual process. Whether this was a protracted ceremony is less clear. Whilst there is generally no surviving evidence of phases of exposure between deposits, the pits could, of course, have been temporarily sealed, and the effects of short intervals between episodes might not be archaeologically visible depending on season and environment.

Seasonal structured deposition was suggested on the basis of pit filling stratigraphy from excavations of settlements on the new A2 near Gravesend, parallel to the Channel Tunnel Rail Link (Allen et al., 2012). Pit 9010 in particular, one of the largest and at 1.85 m one of the deepest on Site G, yielded a succession of human and animal deposits with a layer of clean chalk dividing the lower from the upper filling, suggesting two separate episodes of deposition in the early–middle pre-Roman Iron Age.

An example of human burials that scarcely warrants description as a cemetery, but which hardly qualifies as a settlement with integrated burials, is the ‘banjo’ enclosure group from Micheldever Wood, Hampshire (Fig. 4.4; Fasham, 1987). The purpose of ‘banjo’ enclosures is still not entirely self-evident, though their distinctive plan, with splaying ditches at the entrance, more like a flask than a banjo, is often thought to relate to stock-control, though the long passage could equally have served as a processional way. Ritual involving formal burial is not normally regarded as a primary function, though seasonal pastoral activities could involve a measure of ritual festivity. In the case of Micheldever Wood, the dozen complete burials are almost exclusively of infants, and their disposal in pits or in the enclosure ditch

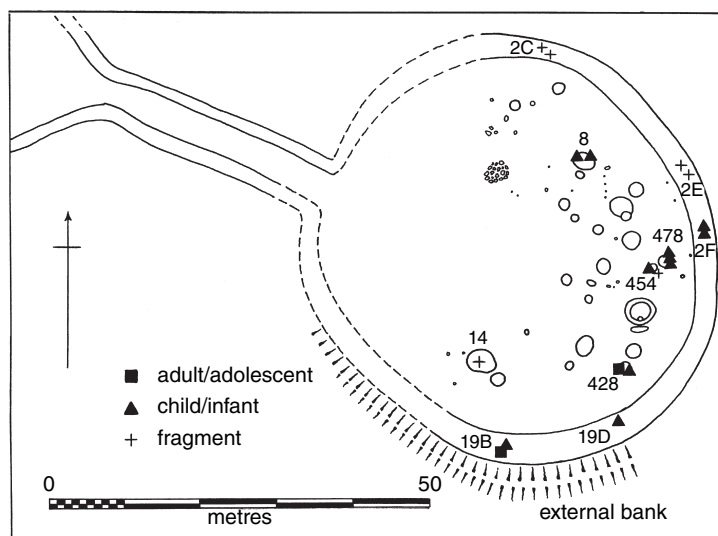


Fig. 4.4 Micheldever Wood, Hampshire, banjo enclosure plan with burials. Drawing adapted from Fasham, 1987.

does not appear to involve the cutting of a grave. The recent excavation of burials from the enclosure at Winterborne Kingston (Cheetham et al., 2013) suggests that these, and related enclosures with antennae ditches like Tolpud-dle Ball, could have served a ritual function involving burial, and raises the possibility that burial rituals were becoming more formalized in Wessex in the later pre-Roman Iron Age.

Comparing evidence of special deposits from the Upper Thames gravel settlements, and from Gravelly Guy in particular (Lambrick and Allen, 2004), with the patterns that emerged from Wessex settlements, it was stressed that the Upper Thames deposits were not concentrated in any particular location, but were integrated into 'the fabric of ordinary living' (ibid. 155). Whilst they occurred within and around the domestic areas, very few such deposits seem to have been made within the round-houses themselves, and where they do occur it is of individual bones, rather than burials of whole or substantial parts of bodies. The commonest contexts, as elsewhere, are pits and ditches, and very often in the middle or upper fillings, rather than at the bottom of either, though this is of course within the surviving deposits, which at Gravelly Guy had been subject to significant truncation. Pit deposits commonly included a plentiful mixture of bones and cultural material in a manner that made it difficult to distinguish a 'single act of deposition or to define its limits' (ibid. 221), in the way that Hill had suggested for Winnall Down. As elsewhere, human and animal remains seem commonly to have been deposited together, and in general the treatment of animal remains appears to have mirrored that of human remains. The pattern of deposition remains notably consistent from the early Iron Age phases of settlement through to the early Roman period.

Individual human bones, perhaps unfortunately described as 'stray' in the excavation report, followed broadly the same pattern of distribution, with perhaps a slightly greater incidence in ditches and gullies. They were commonly found in the middle or upper fills, rather than as primary deposits, frequently in association with animal bones and occasionally with artefacts. Fragments of skull and major long bones feature prominently in the inventory, though it is always hard to be sure that this is not simply a factor of durability. One skull fragment, from pit 326, had been 'modified' by cutting and polishing into a disc, with a perforation near the edge to allow suspension as a pendant. Its associations, including unusual baked clay 'plates', together with six loom-weights, daub, and briquetage as well as animal bone, certainly argues for special deposit status. The pit also contained some quantities of burnt stone, which characterized several of the deposits of human and animal bone at Gravelly Guy and for which parallels with Danebury and Winnall Down were cited (ibid. 243), presumably the product of activity associated with the deposition ritual.

At Mount Farm, Dorchester, the same range of human deposits, from complete burials to individual bones, and again with a disproportionate

representation of neonatal remains, was found in pits and ditches. The distribution (Lambrick, 2010: fig. 46) showed a concentration of deposits around the area of a former Early–Middle Bronze Age ring-ditch, which may not have been fortuitous. But it is surely significant that the area that seems most likely to have been the focus of domestic housing, to the immediate east of the ring-ditch, is notably devoid of human deposits, with the exception of a couple of individual neonatal bones from ditches.

Among relatively few sites in the eastern Chilterns that have produced extensive evidence for Iron Age settlement, Fairfield Park, Bedfordshire (Webley et al., 2007), yielded one structural pattern of pits that is without precedent in the British Iron Age (Fig. 4.5). Enclosure IV on Site A, assigned to the middle Iron Age occupation of the site, was a small, ditched compound of trapezoidal plan, open on its shortest side. On its northern and eastern sides it was surrounded by a line of pits, a metre or so beyond the outer lip of the



Fig. 4.5 Fairfield Park, Bedfordshire, Site A plan. Drawing adapted from Webley et al., 2007.

ditch. On a site in which pits occurred for the most part in profuse clusters that showed no particular order, the significance of this linear arrangement is unclear, and its association with the enclosure is inferred only from the fact that it follows the enclosure plan. Most of the pits were largely devoid of finds, in marked contrast to the enclosure ditch itself, which was particularly rich in animal bone and pottery near its terminals, but which also yielded a worked human femur from the filling of its secondary recut. The south-eastern terminal pit 3049, however, contained quantities of pottery and animal bone. At the opposite end of the series at the north-west corner of the compound pit 5189 contained a crouched inhumation, while the next but one, pit 4867, likewise contained the lower limbs of another inhumation, severely truncated by site stripping. Both were of sub-adults, buried without apparent grave-goods. Within the enclosure pit 3011 contained juvenile human leg bones in a sequence of alternating artefact-rich deposits and slumped or re-deposited natural soils. The presence of pits which might qualify as special and the filling of the ditch itself is surely indicative of ceremonial or ritual activity.

Site B at Fairfield Park highlighted a significant degree of selectivity in the deposit of human remains. All the complete skeletons were of neonatal infants or children, whereas the few adult bones were disarticulated individual bones, all seemingly from the left side of the body. This may reflect the fact that adults were exposed to excarnation, after which certain parts of the skeleton were selectively deposited around the settlement, whereas infants were accorded 'a briefer cycle of mortuary ritual' (ibid. 149). None was actually deposited within any of the houses themselves. All of the disarticulated bones from both Sites A and B were from the left side of the body, 'suggesting deliberate selection' (ibid. 99). Some of the pits especially appeared to have structured fillings in the sense identified in Wessex. Pit 156 contained the greatest quantity of finds, with seven distinct layers of backfill over primary silt comprising both layers of re-deposited natural soil and artefact-rich layers, the penultimate of which contained a human femur. It is hard to avoid the conclusion that these deposits of human bone, together with some animal burials, were socially meaningful, but unlike the Wessex and Upper Thames examples they appear to include complete human burials in close proximity to the settlement focus.

Several sites in west Yorkshire have yielded human burials in pits or ditches in and around Iron Age settlements. At Ledston (Roberts, 2005a) the fragmentary remains of an adult and two infants were found in one of several enclosure ditches that appeared to define and segregate an area of settlement, represented by pits, and possibly houses and four-posters, from agricultural fields. Two other flexed adult inhumations were found in pits within the settlement area, one, pit 424, notable for being flanked by parallel lengths of gully with postholes at either end that may have supported a rectangular platform or mortuary structure over the burial pit. This pit, which contained some animal bone but no accompanying artefacts, was in the excavator's



estimate custom-built rather than re-used, and in any event this and neighbouring sites are on the fringes of the pit-storage distribution zone (*ibid.* 31–2).

### Enclosure ditch deposits

Apart from pits the second most common location for the deposition of human remains, whether whole or partial bodies or individual bones, is within enclosure ditches. This is apparent in phase 1 at Winnall Down, perhaps with a marginally greater density of deposits flanking the entrance, though this effect can be exaggerated by schematic plans. But this pattern is by no means universal, as the distribution of material at Old Down Farm testifies, where human bone was conspicuously absent from the ditches (Davies, 1981). At Gussage All Saints (Fig. 4.6; Wainwright, 1979) human remains were generally located towards the periphery of the enclosure, rather than in the interior, though how this related to the distribution of buildings is hard to tell since the latter appear to have been almost entirely truncated by agriculture. Superficially, human deposits might appear to have been more widely distributed in phase 3, but this impression may be misleading in view of the fragmentation of the settlement in this phase into several smaller compounds. Four adult or adolescent burials in the south-east sector were certainly outside the cluster of compounds, but others, notably infant burials, were found in the ditch of the polygonal enclosure, while others could well have been on the line of sections of gully, now eroded, that would have completed an enclosure on the north-west side of the site.

Several sites in the Upper Thames region, such as Mount Farm, have yielded human remains or fragments from enclosure ditches, reinforcing the idea that these were in some sense liminal markers. But one of the most intriguing settlements with burials in archetypically liminal locations is Latton Lands (Fig. 4.7), not far from the source of the Thames on the Wiltshire–Gloucestershire border (Powell et al., 2009). The settlement has a sequence of occupation represented by round-houses with pits and four-poster structures together with linear boundaries and small stock enclosures from the early Iron Age through into the Romano-British period. Of particular relevance in the present context was the redesigning of the layout in the late pre-Roman Iron Age, in which a quadrilateral enclosure was constructed in the central area, cutting through the ditches of the middle Iron Age enclosures that had flanked a well-defined entrance through the main boundary ditch. The enclosure ditch was not substantial, and no structural features of any significance survived within it, so that it may have been no more than a stock corral. The ditches had largely silted up before the burials were dug into the upper filling, but their very specific locations indicated that the enclosure was still regarded as a significant feature. Grave 1691, near the

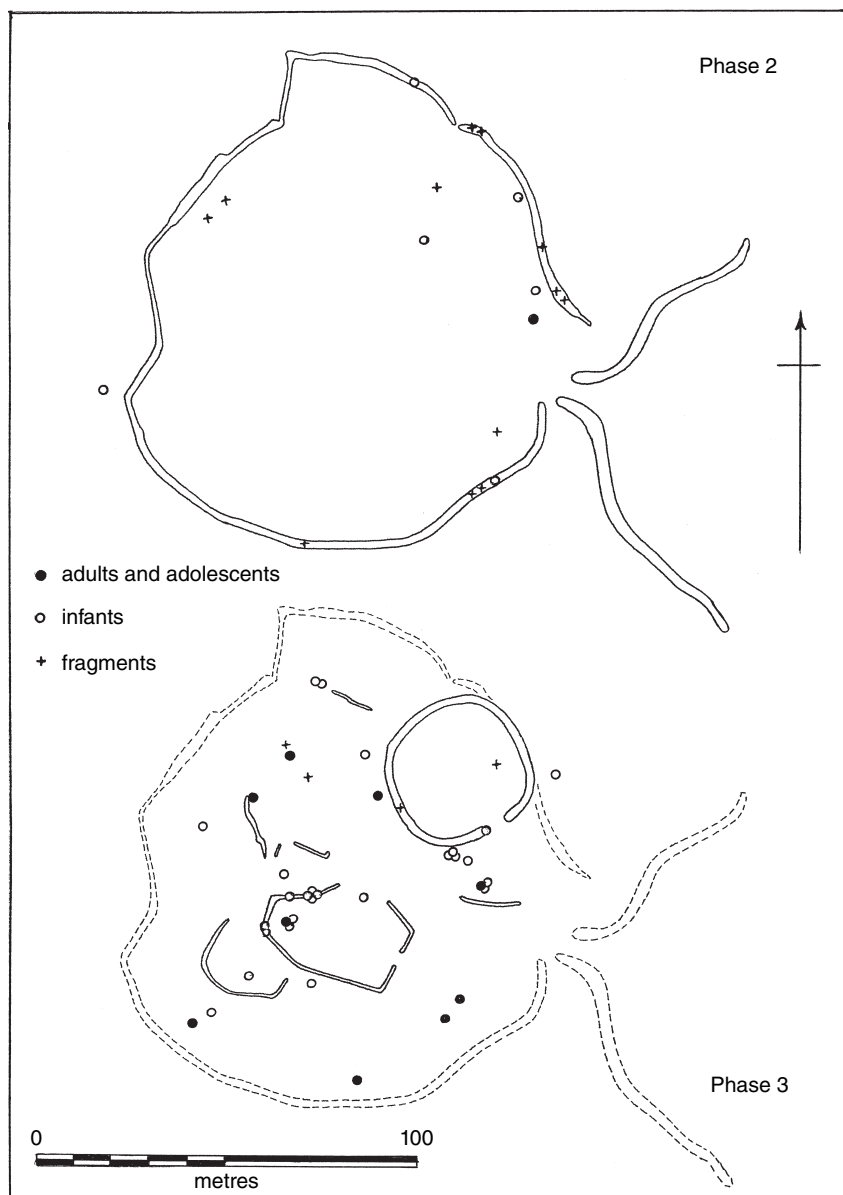


Fig. 4.6 Gussage All Saints, Dorset, phase 2 and phase 3 plans. Drawing adapted from Wainwright, 1979.

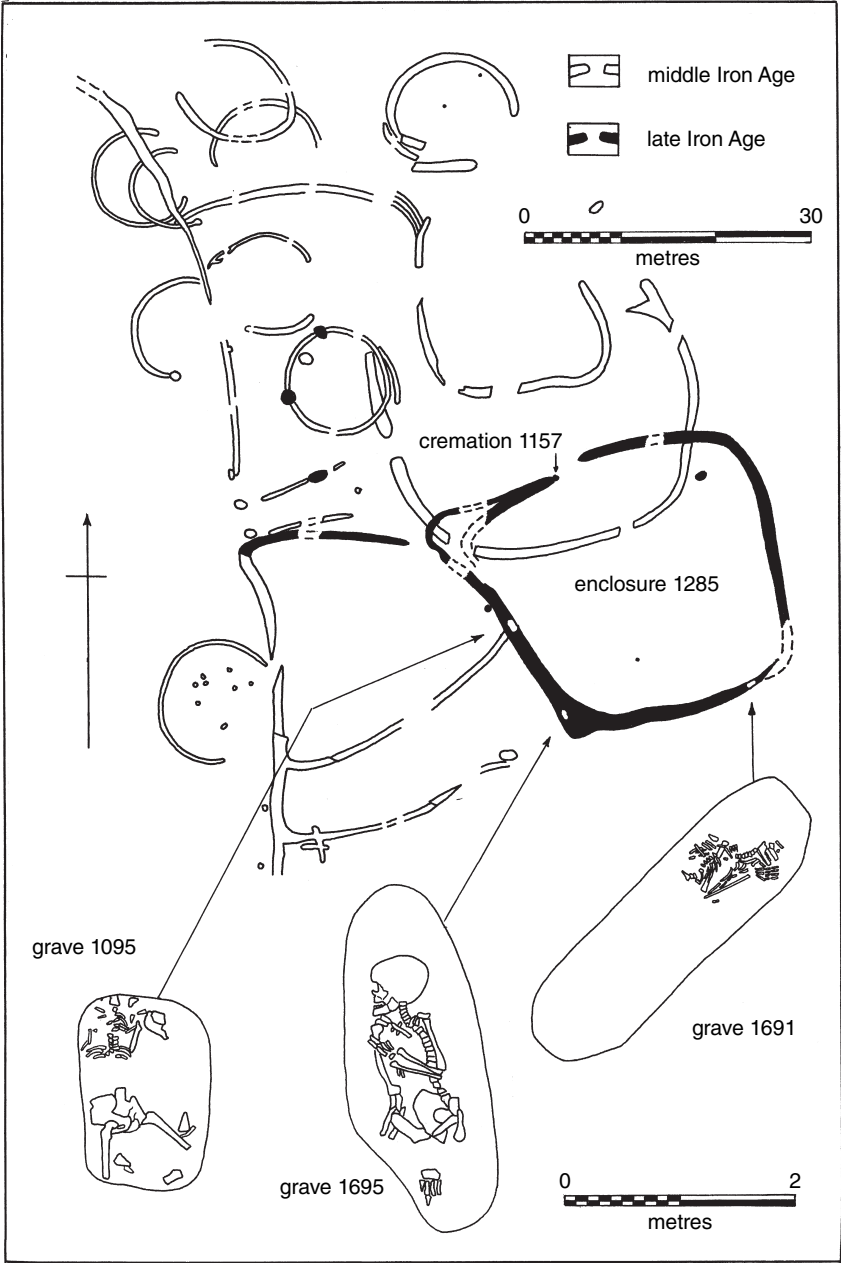


Fig. 4.7 Latton Lands, Wiltshire, settlement plan with burials. Drawing adapted from Powell et al., 2009.

south-east corner, contained a crouched adult inhumation with an Aucissa brooch dating to the mid-first century AD and a second burnt inhumation. Grave 1695 in the south-west corner was another crouched inhumation of a mature male. Cremation 1157 was a partially burnt and incomplete adult in the western terminal of the ditch flanking the northern entrance. It was accompanied by indeterminate animal bones and quantities of charcoal and other possible remnants of a pyre. Finally grave 1095, strategically located at the point where the enclosure ditch intersected the earlier enclosure ditch, comprised a supine skeleton of a mature male resting on burnt timbers and charcoal that may have been the remnants of an *in situ* pyre. The filling over the grave contained pottery of the mid-first century AD, though C14 dating of the cremated remains suggested a pre-conquest date for the deposit. The locations of these burials, at the enclosure's corners, by its entrance, and at the intersection of ditches, all seem deliberate and significant, and the excavator was surely justified in inferring a ritual context, perhaps involving the assertion or reinforcing of entitlement to land rights. A key element appears to be the change of layout and function of the site, from a regular settlement with house enclosures in the middle Iron Age to a more limited purpose in the ensuing period focused on the single enclosure.

An additional dimension was added to the significance of human deposits in liminal locations by the human skulls found in a ditch deposit at High Barns Farm, Great Barford, in Bedfordshire (Timby et al., 2007: fig. 2.7), which the excavators believed included evidence for deliberate curation of remains. Here the western ditch of enclosure 21 contained an extended inhumation, with three further human skulls along the ditch bottom, spaced out at intervals. One skull was 3 metres to the north of the complete inhumation, in the ditch terminal, while 3 metres to the south was a skull fragment of a child with that of another adult just over a metre beyond that. Radiocarbon dates indicated that all were deposited in the later middle pre-Roman Iron Age, but suggested that the last fragment may have been somewhat older, and therefore curated prior to final deposition. The material infilling the ditch over these remains was unusually rich in finds, including two near-complete middle Iron Age pottery vessels, one with geometric ornament, the other decorated with an interlocking 'yin-yang' design reminiscent of the bowls from Hunsbury, Northamptonshire (Harding, 2007: fig. 7.5, 7 and 8). The excavators cited a parallel example of the closure episode in the filling of the later enclosure ditch 3 at Hardingstone, Northamptonshire, which had been backfilled with 'a thick deposit of burnt and charred material' (Woods, 1969: 23), including a fragment of human skull that had been perforated with a single hole, perhaps for the purposes of suspension. For Great Barford Webley concluded that 'the impression is of a deposit of midden-type material that also incorporated selected "placed" objects, including the human remains' (Timby et al., 2007: 62). The context, however, remains essentially a domestic and agricultural

settlement, and the suggestion therefore was that these episodes might have marked the end of the site's use, perhaps on the death of someone important associated with it. The regular spacing of the skulls recalls the disposition of five infant burials in the sub-enclosure at Silverstone Fields Farm on the Northamptonshire uplands (Mudd, 2008). Other articulated inhumations from these sites reinforce the view that burials of both adults and infants were commonly found in or associated with enclosure ditches and possibly relating to similar episodes.

### **Ditch deposits adjacent to enclosure entrances**

In phase 2 at Gussage All Saints (Fig. 4.6; Wainwright, 1979) an adolescent female and an infant were buried in separate pits on the north side of the inner entrance, the former (pit 435) being carefully laid, with a line of flint nodules and chalk blocks against the skull and spine, in apparent contrast to the burials of phase 3 that had been 'disposed of casually with the domestic rubbish' (ibid. 191). The ditches flanking the entrance in phase 2 also contained several deposits of individual bones, significantly fragments of skull and femur, suggesting deliberate selection.

Deliberate deposition in ditches seems more remarkable than pit deposits, since the re-use of an individual pit for a secondary purpose need not preclude the remainder in a group continuing to function for storage. Ditches by contrast were presumably dug to form an effective boundary, which purpose would seem to be negated by parts being filled with secondary deposits. The apparent contradiction in purpose was particularly evident at Pimperne, Dorset (Harding et al., 1993), where the ditch flanking the east gateway on its northern side appears to have been backfilled almost immediately after construction, thereby nullifying its effectiveness in constraining access through the gateway. Evidence for rapid backfilling was the steep-sided profile of the ditch, and the crisp, unabraded appearance of the bedrock chalk and flint seams through which the ditch had cut, together with the total absence of silt lines in its lower filling. By contrast, the upper filling of the ditch comprised a dense packing of large, flint nodules in a matrix of brown humus for the final 9 metres of its length. The flint nodules were such as could be gathered from the surface of any cultivated field in the vicinity, not without considerable effort, though existing clearance cairns could well have afforded a ready-made source. Beneath this cairn-like filling adjacent to the entrance causeway was a single human femur, not itself burnt but resting in a patch of ash. Half way along the 'reverse cairn' was half a human skull, of a young adult, possibly female, split vertically and lacking the mandible. One right and two left temporal bones were found in the filling of the ditch on the south side of the entrance, and a fragment of skull was recovered from one posthole of the entrance passage. These were plainly not

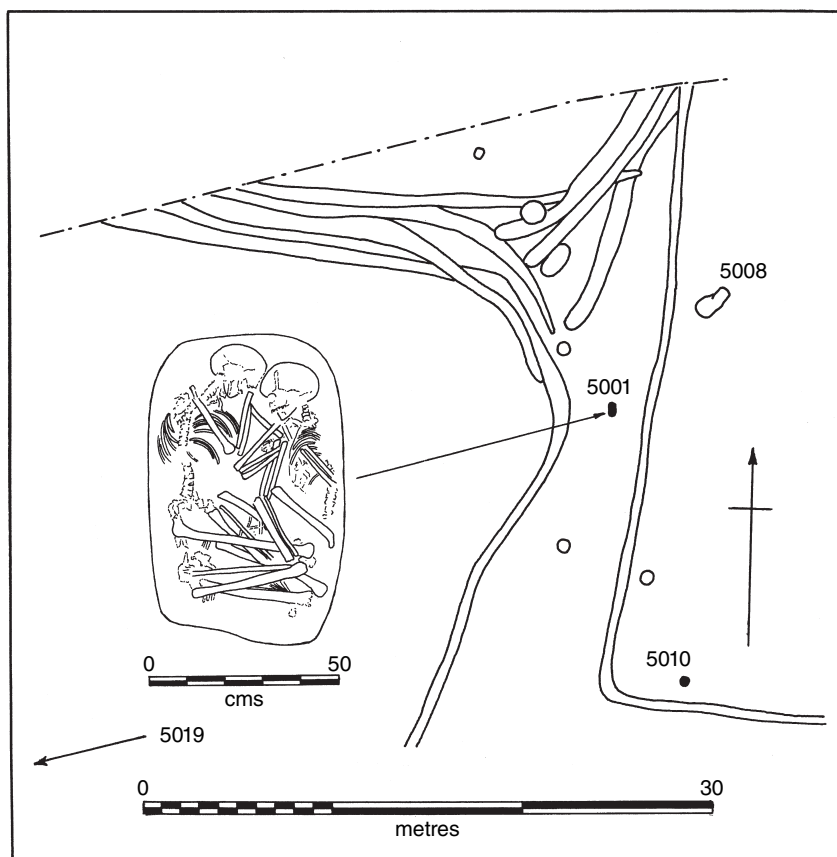


Fig. 4.8 Watchfield, Oxfordshire, site plan with double burial. Drawing adapted from Birbeck, 2001.

‘casual’ deposits, and, particularly in the light of animal remains found in the ditches of the southern entrance at Pimperne, it seems reasonable to regard these as deliberate deposits, intended in some way to imbue the settlement or its entrance with the spiritual benefits of their presence. What it most certainly did not achieve was any practical enhancement of the protective perimeter, since the backfilling of the ditch would have left the residual enclosure bank as the sole barrier at this point.

The entrance approaches were the focus of burials at Watchfield, Shrivenham (Fig. 4.8; Birbeck, 2001), where both human and animal deposits were located in the area of ‘antenna’ ditches leading to a complex, multi-period entrance to what the excavator inferred to be an early-middle Iron Age enclosure of around 2 hectares. One burial pit, 5001, lying centrally within the passage defined by the phase 3d antenna ditch, contained the tightly

crouched and intertwined skeletons of an adult female and a juvenile. Another, pit 5010, was close to the outer corner of the antenna ditch itself, and contained a young adult female, again tightly crouched, and with a neonatal skeleton by her left hand. Neither burial contained specific grave-goods, but pottery sherds in the pit fillings indicated a span within a broad range from fifth to third centuries BC. These burials, however, were not the only special deposits in and around the ditch system. The ditch of the presumed phase 3d enclosure itself also contained a compact and possibly structured deposit comprising a near-complete cattle skull and pig bones, including an axially split skull. Perhaps most striking, however, was pit 5008 nearby, in the base of which was buried a cattle skull together with a human skull which had been trepanned *ante mortem*. Further beyond the parallel ditches pit 5019 contained a complete cattle skeleton that bore no signs of butchery or other cause of death. Apart from these special deposits, the site gave no indication structurally or artefactually of a function other than that of an agricultural settlement, probably with a bias towards pastoralism, though the fact that the interior of the presumed enclosure was not excavated necessarily leaves the issue open.

Among the partial human remains deposited in enclosure ditches, one of the most striking examples is from the northern outer ditch terminal of the eastern entrance at Sutton Common (van de Noort et al., 2007). It is not clear whether the two fragmentary skulls, both apparently adult males, were in the primary filling of the ditch among re-deposited oak timbers or not (ibid. 88, 149), though they appear to be assigned to the period of the site's use. Whilst there is little else to indicate the nature of their deposition, the parallel with the Pimperne entrance deposit certainly suggests that this too was a deliberate act, and the character of the later activity at Sutton Common does not preclude the possibility of a votive deposition related to funerary rites.

A late example of burials in ditches adjacent to an enclosure entrance is the mid-first-century AD rectilinear compound at Folly Lane, Verulamium (Niblett, 1999). Here three female inhumations were buried in the ditch terminal on the south-east side of the entrance, two on the floor of the ditch and one on a shelf on its outer edge. There was no evidence of trauma on the skeletal remains and no artefactual or other associations with their burial. None had any trace of a grave cut into ditch filling, and all were seemingly placed in position immediately after the construction of the ditch. The significance of their all being female is unclear, but the function of the enclosure was apparently ritual, and their location in a primary context by the entrance surely implies a foundation episode. In the corresponding western ditch terminal a single human humerus was found in a pit in rapid silt, apparently a classic example of a votive deposit of a significant long bone.

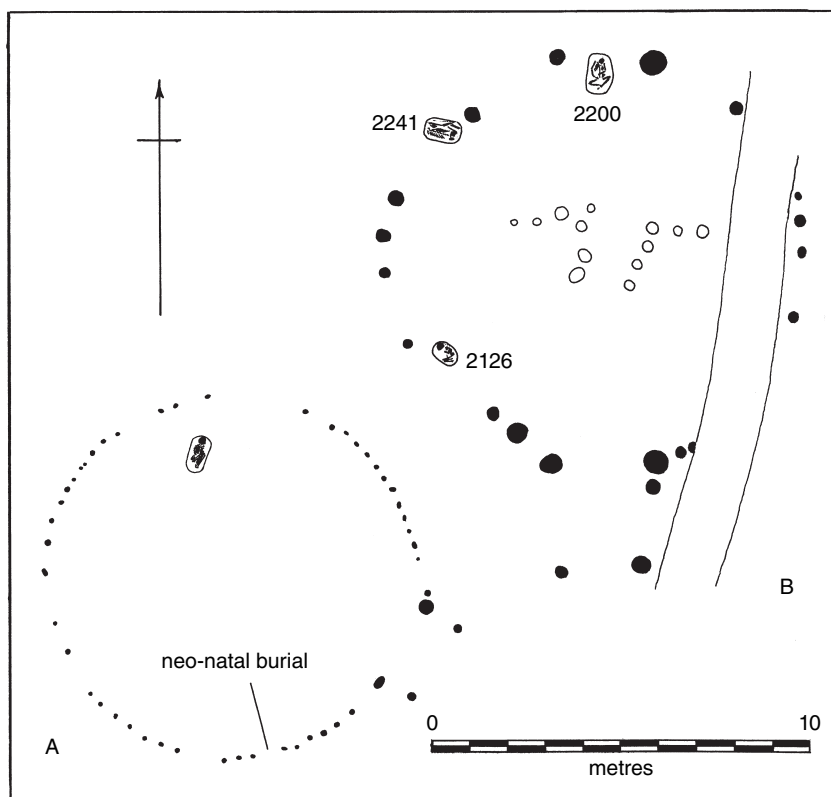
## Human remains and houses

An important issue in the case of human remains from settlements is their spatial relationship to domestic buildings. The pits at Winnall Down belong to the middle pre-Roman Iron Age phase, when the settlement had expanded beyond the limits of the earlier Iron Age enclosure. The round-houses of this period seem to be arranged basically in pairs fronting a linear swathe, vacant of features, that runs approximately NNE–SSW across the site, dividing the houses from a broadly parallel spread of pits (Fig. 3.4). The burial pits lie directly across the ‘street’ from the round-house frontages, with a smaller secondary group to the north-west of the houses in an area previously used as a quarry. Burials appear to have been kept separate from houses, with the exception of an individual fragment in one and infant remains in another.

The general pattern of deposits of human remains in and around settlements in the Upper Thames region, as we have suggested above, would appear to endorse the conclusion that burials other than neonatal skeletons or single bones were not sited within the confines of houses. Two possible exceptions may be noted, from Frilford (Harding, 1987) and Spring Road, Abingdon (Allen and Kamash, 2008), which therefore require explanation. At Frilford (Fig. 4.9A) the tightly crouched, possibly bound or bagged skeleton of an adolescent was contained within a small pit within a stake-circle structure with projecting south-east entrance. A neonatal burial had been inserted into the contemporary topsoil beside this circle on its southern sector. Pottery and other artefacts indicated use of the structure around the second or first centuries BC. The lack of an inner post-circle to provide roof support within its 9.5-metre diameter suggests that the structure was not roofed and the absence of hearths or a typically domestic assemblage argues against its interpretation as a domestic dwelling. The site stratigraphy makes it clear that there was no direct continuity between this building and the subsequent Romano-Celtic temple complex, though this need not exclude the possibility that later folk memory revived an earlier tradition of the site’s sanctity.

At Spring Road, Abingdon (Fig. 4.9B), three burials in purpose-dug pits were spaced around the north-western perimeter of a circle of intermittent and irregular posts, more substantial than those of the Frilford structure, but like the latter distinguished by a projecting porch. The building may have had an inner post-circle at one stage, and the surviving pattern of internal postholes could represent partitions or a central structural focus to the building. Burial 2126 was of a child of 4–5 years, in crouched posture and with some additional infant bones. A bone ring near the skull was presumably a deliberate association. In burial 2241 a young adult male, whose head and upper vertebrae had been removed by later intrusion, lay prone with legs flexed. The third burial, 2200, a nearly complete adult male, was likewise prone but with legs apart and flexed. Neither of these last two had grave-goods, though there

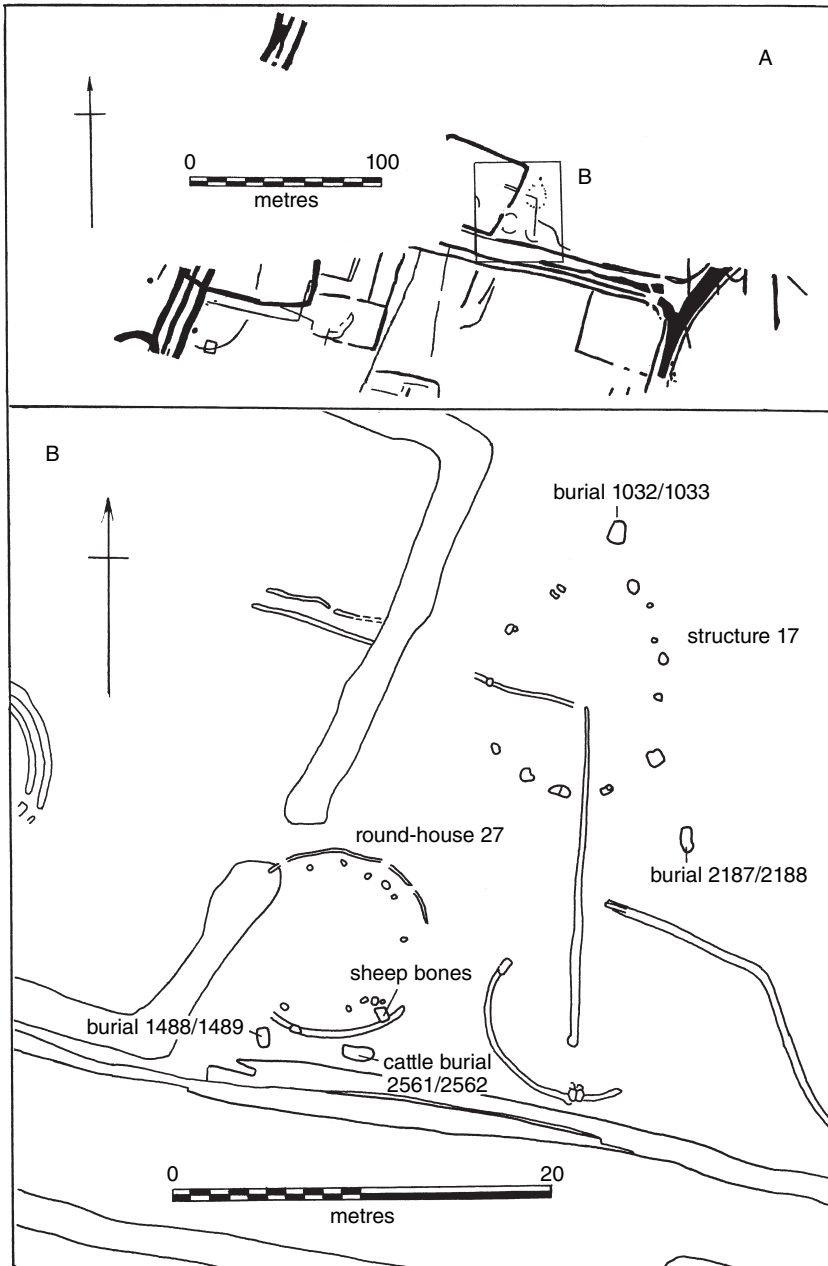




**Fig. 4.9** Circular structures with burials, A, Frilford, Oxfordshire (Berkshire) and B, Abingdon-on-Thames. Drawings adapted from Harding, 1987, and from Allen and Kamash, 2008.

were pottery sherds in the upper filling of their pits. If the pattern was originally symmetrical about the entrance, two further burials could have been truncated by the later ditch that cut the eastern side of the building. Radiocarbon dating of these burials suggested that they belonged to the middle Iron Age, and therefore to the later stages or end of the use of the structure. They were thus hardly foundation deposits, though they may have been occasioned by the building's closure or abandonment. Again the ground-plan could pass as a domestic structure, but the disposition of the burials argues for a special ritual purpose.

One further example from the Upper Thames region of human remains deposited in close proximity to what appears to have been the central round-house of a domestic and agricultural settlement is from phase 5/6 of the middle Iron Age occupation at Watkins Farm, Northmoor (Allen, 1990). From ditch



**Fig. 4.10** Melton, Yorkshire, plan of structure 17 and round-house 27 with burials. Drawing adapted from Fenton-Thomas, 2011.

495 fragments of human cranium showed a number of cuts representing violent peri-mortem or immediately post-mortem injury, whilst a fragment of long bone from the adjacent ditch 410 could have been from the same individual, probably an adult male. The ditches partly enclosed the central house, so that they might reasonably be regarded as integral to the house complex, and therefore represent a closer than usual association of a house with adult human remains.

We have already noted the inhumation cemetery and square-ditched barrow from Melton in south Yorkshire (Fenton-Thomas, 2011). These were not the only burials found at Melton, however, and both human and animal burials were recovered, unusually, from two of the structures, round-house 27 and oval building 17, both assigned by radiocarbon samples and material remains to the later pre-conquest Iron Age occupation (Fig. 4.10). Burial 1488/1489 was of an adult female, crouched with head to the north, in a pit that would have been just under the eaves of the round-house outside its ring-groove, except that the pit cut through a deposit that was interpreted as the collapsed debris of the house's roof. Closer to the doorway and intersecting one of the postholes of the house's outer ring was a larger pit containing a complete cow and some bones of another, while on the inside, again close to the doorway, a pit contained the disarticulated remains of two sheep cut the ring-groove. The three deposits were therefore all clearly secondary to the occupation of the house, which may indeed explain their location, if they were part of a closure ritual that followed its abandonment. Building 17 likewise was associated with human burials, both located outside its oval of postholes, one to its north, the other to the south-east. Burial 1032/1033 was a young adult female, flexed and with head to the south, facing the building, burial 2187/2188 was of a child, again flexed, but with head to the north, thus likewise facing the building. Because of its unusual ground-plan and lack of surviving ring-groove, the excavator questioned whether this was ever a roofed building, and considered a ceremonial function as a possible alternative.

### Occupation deposits and 'middens'

Whilst there is clearly an emphasis on liminal locations, we should not overlook the occurrence of human remains in occupation deposits on sites which have conventionally been regarded as normal domestic and agricultural settlements, but which have no evidence of enclosure. A prime example is All Cannings Cross in Wiltshire (Cunnington, 1923), once a type-site for the earliest Iron Age in Wessex, now regarded as transitional from the latest Bronze Age into the earliest Iron Age. No less than thirty-two fragments of human skull were found, apparently the only human bone from the site (ibid. 40), four of which bore cut marks. One of these, found under one of the

oblong 'pavements' that may have been the foundations for rectangular buildings, or perhaps open-air platforms for some undetermined festive activity (Waddington, 2010), notably had been used as a pendant (Cunnington, 1923: pl. 26, 9), so affording an early record of what would now be termed 'culturally modified' human bone.

What is unusual about All Cannings Cross in comparison to other settlements on the Wessex chalk is the depth and richness of the occupational deposits, estimated at up to 55 cm, though possibly truncated elsewhere by more recent agriculture. The excavator remarked that the 'humus accumulated over a great part of the site seems quite out of proportion to the probable length of occupation' (ibid. 14), whilst within the 'debris of pottery (and) broken bones' haematite-coated furrowed and cordoned bowls, the latter already considered later than the former, were found at all levels. More recent sample excavation (Barrett and McOmish, 2004; Waddington, 2010) has confirmed the density of artefactual debris and animal bone into which the intermittent chalk surfaces are bedded, which is unlike the normal pattern of domestic settlement.

The function of All Cannings Cross has been reviewed in the light of discoveries at Potterne (Lawson, 2000), which gave rise to the identification of a new class of 'midden site' of the later Bronze Age and earliest Iron Age, characterized by the depth and richness of its organic and artefactual deposits. Three characteristics were distinctive at Potterne, the very considerable quantities of dark, anthropogenic soil, the density of artefactual and ecofactual material, and the continuity of practice which resulted in a cumulative deposit on a monumental scale. Whether this was generated by occupation on site, or as a result of material being brought in, whether the site was permanently or seasonally in use, and whether it also served for communal gatherings and even ritual activities, are all issues of debate. Human bone occurred in the midden deposit, mixed with artefactual debris and animal bone, though the quantities—139 fragments—were minimal compared to the faunal assemblage. There was no evidence that the midden had been carefully structured, as the contents of individual pits elsewhere may have been, nor indeed that the fragments of human bone had been curated. McKinley (2000: 100) argued that 'the very abraded condition of some of the bone fragments would suggest that they might have been subject to various episodes of re-deposition or disposal, probably of a not very reverential nature'. On the other hand, if in the Iron Age there was a tradition of conserving human bones or fragments for talismanic reasons, comparable to the cult of relics of Chaucerian England, then such fragments could well have been abraded through handling over many generations. The existence of such midden sites has now been widely recognized in southern Britain, from East Chisenbury in Wiltshire (McOmish et al., 2010) to Whitchurch, Warwickshire (Waddington and Sharples, 2011), and an interim assessment of their significance has been attempted by Waddington (2009), stressing their role in special communal activities.

Among more recent excavations in southern Scotland the site at Phantassie in East Lothian (Lelong and MacGregor, 2007) was conspicuous for the very residual nature of its structural remains, showing how difficult it can be to detect and evaluate settlements that lack the definitive traces of enclosing earthworks. Nevertheless, the site was remarkable for the abundant scatter of burnt human bone, estimated as being from a minimum of sixty-two individuals, including some infants and juveniles, recovered from a variety of contexts including occupational deposits in buildings and around hearths, from middens, and even from within the rubble make-up of the trackway that led from the settlement. One sample only was dated, to 360–50 BC (SUERC-9040), but the majority of the remainder were probably from a similar span. They were at any rate too well preserved to have been all residual from earlier burials scattered by the plough, and they were too many to be dismissed as incidental. We must therefore infer that here as elsewhere selected bones, commonly fragments of skull or major long bones, were deposited deliberately around the settlement in a rite that metaphorically and physically integrated the dead with the living. The one difference in the case of Phantassie, by comparison with southern British examples considered above, was that the remains were apparently cremated, which also stands in contrast to the rite recognized in other Iron Age burials in the region, such as Broxmouth and Dryburn Bridge. Those remains that were deposited in middens it was assumed would eventually find their way on to the surrounding fields in a process that the excavator described as ‘agricultural transformation and regeneration’. Far from implying disrespect through disposal like rubbish, as it might appear to modern sensitivities, this might indicate that the ‘community’s prosperity and continuity mattered more than the individual’s corporal identity’ (ibid. 195–6), or more probably that the remains of the dead were seen as a potent force for ensuring the success of future harvests.

### NEONATAL, INFANT, AND CHILD BURIALS

A number of settlement sites have yielded infant burials. At Gussage All Saints there was a total of thirty-eight (Wainwright, 1979: 191–2), thirty-one of which were from pits and ditches of phase 3. Some were premature, some resulted from natural infant mortality, and some may have been victims of epidemic. The distribution shows no particular concentration of burials in any particular area, nor do they noticeably avoid proximity to domestic quarters.

In the Upper Thames region, the settlement at Gravelly Guy (Lambrick and Allen, 2004) also displayed a high incidence of neonatal and infant burials, which accounts for more than 80 per cent of the complete or near-complete human burials from the site. The majority of these belong to the middle Iron

Age phase of occupation, into which they are integrally incorporated, with a particular concentration in Block 5 of the area excavation between enclosure groups A and B and the south-western boundary. Relatively few pits would have been in use at any one time, and there is evidence of clustering, with several intersecting pits indicating successive episodes of use. Special deposits seem to have been broadly distributed across the site, but, apart from neonatal or infant deposits, not noticeably within contemporary houses (*ibid.* 153 and fig. 6.6).

A high rate of child mortality, relative to modern demographic profiles, may be expected, but their presence around the settlement, compared to the general dearth of burials of the population at large, suggests special treatment. Epidemic in general seems an unlikely explanation, since this might more probably result in a collective cemetery, like that at Garton Slack, rather than the spatially and chronologically distributed pattern observed at Gravelly Guy, while deliberate infanticide of unwanted children would hardly have resulted in burial within the precincts of the settlement. The other option favoured by several commentators has been that they represent deliberate sacrifice, though one might have expected such dedications to have been focused on sites of special ritual significance, such perhaps as Frilford and Spring Road, Abingdon, may have been, rather than in domestic and agricultural settlements. Though proportionately over-represented in the surviving sample of human burials, the absolute number of neonatal and infant burials at Gravelly Guy is perhaps not abnormal for the size of community over the period of time represented. Perhaps therefore the most likely solution is that these neonates and infants, dying of natural causes but being excluded from whatever funerary rites were accorded to the majority of adults, were buried instead within the secure zone of the settlement. At Yarnton (Hey *et al.*, 1999, 2011), therefore, the neonatal burials within the settlement complex should perhaps be treated as a separate phenomenon rather than as 'outliers' of the formal cemeteries.

Salvage excavation in advance of development has yielded examples in Northamptonshire of infant remains in liminal positions in or adjacent to enclosure ditches. The site at Silverstone Fields Farm (Mudd, 2008) produced five foetal or neonatal skeletons from the ditch filling of the sub-rectangular enclosure in the north-west corner of a larger settlement compound, all at the base of the upper filling of the ditch, where they might arguably have been deposited as part of a 'closure episode'. Just above one burial lay an articulated cattle skeleton that yielded a radiocarbon date of 386–200 cal. BC (NZA 16360), while the pottery from the upper ditch filling all belonged to the first century BC or early first century AD. There was no structural evidence from within the compound to indicate its function, though round-houses and a scatter of pits in the outer enclosure would be consistent with normal domestic and agricultural use. The evidence from Silverstone prompted comparison with Wakerley (Jackson and Ambrose, 1978, reviewed by Gwilt, 1997), where a sequence of

settlement through the later pre-Roman Iron Age focused on two successive polygonal enclosures. In the topmost filling of the earlier enclosure ditch were no less than nine infant burials, three from the upper fill of the ditch terminal on the east side of the entrance and a fourth from the middle level of filling of the terminal on its west side (Gwilt, 1997: 160). The remaining five were from unspecified locations in the upper ditch fill. Four other infant burials were reported from shallow graves elsewhere and one from the top of a pit. The excavators argued that the topmost ditch filling, with the burials, was a deliberate act of levelling the enclosure prior to the construction of its successor, an interpretation encouraged by the fact that its dark texture with quantities of animal bone and slag contrasted with the natural silting of the lower ditch deposits. Alternatively, the process could have been more cumulative, with the enclosure ditch being favoured for infant burials much as the ditches of square-ditched barrows had been, neither fully within nor totally beyond the bounds.

## ATLANTIC SCOTLAND

Finds of disarticulated human bone from settlement sites in Atlantic Scotland have been the subject of renewed research in recent years, linked to a programme of radiocarbon dating of older excavated material (Armit and Ginn, 2007; Tucker and Armit, 2009; Tucker, 2010a; Ginn, 2011). Though many sites have produced relevant material, broch settlements especially can have been occupied over a millennium and more, and in many cases the human deposits derive from late secondary contexts. Few modern excavations have actually examined the primary broch occupation; at Dun Vulan, South Uist (Parker Pearson and Sharples, 1999), it was not part of the excavation brief, at Beirgh, west Lewis (Harding and Gilmour, 2000), it was precluded by lack of funding, and at Old Scatness, Shetland (Dockrill, et al., 2006, 2009), it was also not part of the excavation strategy. Given the limitations of dating, there is a case for treating the evidence from Atlantic Scotland as a whole. The apparent demise of broch towers in the opening centuries AD and their superseding by a variety of non-monumental, cellular types of building is widely perceived as corresponding to a major upheaval in the social order that must surely also have impacted upon funerary rites and conventions, whatever those were. This may well account in part for the fact that the great majority of human burials and disarticulated deposits of human skeletal material come from stratigraphically secondary contexts on these multi-period settlements, a pattern reflected also in the recently obtained radiocarbon dates. The position of wheelhouses in this occupational sequence may be arguable, although in many instances they too are demonstrably occupied in the first millennium AD rather than from the earlier Iron Age.

One of the few instances of a significant collection of human remains from the broch itself is from Howe, Orkney (Smith, 1994), where bones recovered from the drain or tank, initially supposed to be of one skeleton but subsequently identified as a young male and young adult female, were radiocarbon dated  $2380 \pm 50$  bp (GU-1799), now calibrated to 760–380 BC. Their deposit in the tank was assigned to the period of the building's abandonment, which was estimated on the basis of the series of radiocarbon dates as the end of the third century, thus implying that the bones must have been old when buried. The idea that human bones might have been curated is certainly no longer novel, any more than is the possibility that a burial might deliberately be reconstituted incorporating the bones of more than one individual. The deposit may therefore have been part of a closure rite, signalling the end of the building's occupation. A second group of remains from Howe, from the broch village occupation, was found within the collapsed rubble in one of the yard cells of the north-western extra-mural building cluster of phase 7. The substantial part of an adult male skeleton has now been radiocarbon dated to cal. 40 BC–AD 180 (Tucker and Armit, 2009). In the adjacent yard were the remains of an infant and a foetus, also in the rubble, with a young adolescent in the underlying midden. These remains were not seen as formal burials nor yet as ritual deposits, but simply the product of 'a breakdown in social organisation' (Smith, 1994: 281). In a social order whose funerary rituals are almost totally invisible archaeologically, it must nevertheless be significant that these visible deposits coincide with the end of the broch occupation.

More common than complete or near-complete skeletons are disarticulated human remains or fragments, not infrequently of skulls, as in the case of the two fragments recovered from the wall gallery at Dun Vulcan, not recorded in the excavation report (Parker Pearson and Sharples, 1999) but reported subsequently (Mulville et al., 2003: 23). These came from the lower floor levels and a subsequent deposit within the chamber, hardly foundation deposits nor yet stratigraphically from a closure context. They were radiocarbon dated to the centuries either side of the millennium (180 BC–AD 60, AA-48587 and 60 BC–AD 220, AA-48586), and probably represent activity towards the end of the broch occupation. Interestingly, other fragments from Dun Vulcan included a fragment of human mandible from a foundation deposit in Building B, radiocarbon dated to 110 BC–AD 130 (AA-48594), that must have been curated for several centuries before being incorporated into the later structure. A date was also obtained for the cranium from the right-hand guard cell of the Lingro broch in Orkney, calibrated to 120 BC–AD 60 (SUERC-23662), while a fragment from Whitegate, Caithness, gave a slightly earlier reading (Tucker and Armit, 2009). There are numerous antiquarian reports of fragmentary human remains from broch sites (Armit and Ginn, 2007; Ginn, 2011), but, because the multi-period sequences of these settlements were seldom appreciated and never adequately excavated, the record is generally unreliable regarding context.



There are, nevertheless, records of human deposits, both substantially whole and fragmentary, from secondary structures, such as those from the rubble fill of the secondary 'earth-house' at Bu, Orkney, which included two adults, an adolescent, two children, and four infants (Hedges, 1987, part 1: 91). No grave cuttings were detected, here or in the rubble of the main building, so that the excavator concluded that the 'collapsing site was used extensively for the disposal of the dead', though it seems questionable whether the choice of site for these burials was quite as casually opportunistic as that might imply. The seated burial at Crosskirk, Caithness, on the other hand, appears to have been a more formal burial, in a stone cist beside the central hearth of a domestic dwelling of late period 3, by which time the broch itself was in a state of dereliction. The excavator evidently regarded the burial as a late insertion, after which the building was burnt, as evidenced by 'a layer of burnt organic material', interpreted as the debris from its thatched roof, and quantities of ash on the floor (Fairhurst, 1984: 85). Though it is possible that the burial had been installed during the occupancy of the building, so that the dead might 'remain in communication with the living' (Armit and Ginn, 2007: 118), or vice versa, this macabre scenario would be unique. The date of this episode, however, is less clear. Radiocarbon dates obtained at the time of the excavation suggested that the burial might have been as early as the closing centuries of the first millennium BC, but a more recent assay (Tucker and Armit, 2009) would assign it, more plausibly in view of the building's position in the site sequence, nearer to the mid-first millennium AD. That broch sites continued to be used for occasional burials long after the demise of the monumental Atlantic round-house is also demonstrated by the disarticulated skeleton from Dun Mor Vaul on Tiree.

Chronologically the evidence from wheelhouses or aisled round-houses is rather more equivocal. For the majority of sites there can be little doubt that they belong to a post-broch horizon, as at Jarlshof, Shetland, and Old Scatness, but the application of a rigid archaeological typology tends to obscure the fact that circular or sub-circular structures with walls revetted into subsoil and with internal space divided by radial slabs or piers are already an element in building technology by the later Bronze Age in Shetland and elsewhere (Harding, 2009). The earlier buildings of the Late Bronze Age village at Jarlshof (Hamilton, 1956) were essentially cellular, 'courtyard' houses, but in its later phase, building V included two radial piers that anticipate the wheel-house model. A fragment of cranium from the passage linking the two appears to confirm the early Iron Age date of this structure (Tucker and Armit, 2009). The other striking instance of human remains in a wheelhouse context is the pit deposits below structure 5 at Hornish Point, South Uist (Barber et al., 1989; Barber, 2003), where the skeleton of a young juvenile was disarticulated and distributed between four pits, three of which also contained deposits of animal remains. The human remains have now yielded a late first-millennium BC date of 170 BC–AD 20 (SUERC-24241) while the animal bones produced a

marginally earlier but not significantly different result, affording a useful *terminus post quem* for the wheelhouse. Although there is clear evidence from cut marks for deliberate disarticulation, it remains unclear at what stage this occurred, and indeed what was the cause of death, natural, accidental, or violent. The combination of human and animal remains in four pits suggests structured deposition, and a foundation rite at the time of construction of the building seems plausible. At Cnip, west Lewis, the human skull below the floor of the small cellular building 3 that opened off wheelhouse 1 was surely a foundation deposit, as was presumably the head including beak of a great auk, found with a small, complete pot behind the wall of the unfinished second wheelhouse (Armit, 2006: ill. 2.26).

In her review of human remains Tucker (2010a: 206) concluded that 'the proximity of the dead to the living within the household was in Iron Age Atlantic Scotland something that was thought normal, desirable or beneficial'. As we have seen, there is a strong emphasis on the placement of human remains in either foundation or closure contexts, so that the day-to-day coexistence of the living and the dead is less apparent. Mine Howe on Orkney is obviously exceptional, and it is likely that access to the metal-working centre would have been controlled by conventions relating to the status of the smith in Iron Age society.

## CONCLUSION

The practice of depositing human remains in liminal positions in the Iron Age undoubtedly had much earlier origins; the reason why it becomes archaeologically conspicuous from the later Bronze Age onwards is simply because of the greater emphasis that was placed upon creating land divisions and boundaries from that time. But it seems probable that the selection of some individuals in death to continue to serve the living community by burial in and around settlements was always an established part of funerary protocol. What is less clear is whether the incorporation of the dead in whole or in part among the living reflects a diversity of independent depositional practices or whether they represent different stages in a process that might ultimately result in total fragmentation and dispersal. There is an increasing body of evidence to suggest that human remains were curated after death, sometimes for considerable periods of time, before final deposition. Where bodies have been excarnated, this may have resulted in total disarticulation and the subsequent distribution of bones for disposal or burial in more than one location. Necessarily it is only in the final stage that the remains register, if at all, in the archaeological record, but this represents only a final glimpse of what may have been a complex funerary process. As Armit and Ginn observed,

It is only the 'decommissioning' of these ritually-charged artefacts that we see archaeologically. So what form did the posthumous ritual lives of these human remains take prior to disposal?

(Armit and Ginn, 2007: 129)

Some may raise an eyebrow at the use of the term 'artefact' to describe human remains, but it is effectively as artefacts that the dead or their disarticulated bones are being manipulated to the service of the living. That being the case, then it is less surprising that relatively little evidence survives archaeologically, since we must assume that, like any other artefact, human remains in these circumstances will be exposed to the same taphonomic and environmental factors that result in the very partial survival of ancient artefacts generally.

Brück (2006) argued for the Bronze Age that the conceptual divide between people and artefacts has been exaggerated by post-Enlightenment rationalism, and that in prehistory artefacts may have been regarded as an extension of the human persona, thus explaining the apparently ritual 'killing' or decommission of objects such as swords in graves or hoards. She made a persuasive case for regarding the fragmentation of the dead and the dispersal of bones around a settlement, or the inclusion of only a small proportion of cremated remains in the formal burial, presumably so that other samples could be deposited or curated elsewhere, as an act akin to the ritual breaking and dispersal of pottery and other artefacts as appears to be testified by partial deposits in graves. In the case of Mortimer's Bronze Age burials in Yorkshire small deposits of bone or the cremated remains of a second person might be included in some inhumation graves effectively in lieu of a pot or other artefact, indicating that the fragmentation and dispersal, curation and re-depositing of human remains and of inanimate artefacts was already fundamental to funerary ritual in the Bronze Age. Alien though the notion may be to us, it is clear that 'conceptions of personhood were very different from the modern, western "individual"' (ibid. 80).

Whatever else we may conclude, it is surely now beyond doubt that the deposit of human skeletal remains in and around settlements was not 'casual'. We can only speculate what the impact upon the archaeological record would have been had Iron Age communities adopted the same approach to the integration of their dead through the medium of cremation.

Not surprisingly, any differences between the deposition of human remains in hillforts and in other settlements reflect those sites' function. In settlements burials and fragments are found in every related context, both 'liminal' and occupational, though seldom in close proximity to domestic buildings other than in the context of foundation or closure deposits. In hillforts they almost certainly reflect a specialist role in the funerary process, notably in excarnation or interim inhumation, but doubtless also in other processes relating to disarticulation and fragmentation.

## Focal and signal burials

The term 'focal' burial refers to burials that appear from spatial distribution within a cemetery to have acted as a focus for subsequent burials. They may be distinguished by their larger size or by the fact that they contain more lavish grave-goods. The term was used by Fitzpatrick (1997) to highlight certain larger or better-equipped graves at Westhampnett, though there was no unequivocal spatial relationship between the supposed 'focal' burials and others. At King Harry Lane, Verulamium (Fig. 3.18), Stead and Rigby (1989: 83) had identified several larger graves of phase 1 with more notable assemblages as central to 'family' clusters defined by their enclosure. The concept of family groups was challenged by Millett (1993), who nevertheless saw these 'focal' graves, whether enclosed or unenclosed, as potential 'founders' graves' in socially allied units. There is no doubt that graves 241, 299, and 325 of phase 1, and possibly grave 148 of phase 2 and grave 41 of phase 3, stand out as candidates for founders' graves within their compounds, whilst graves 272, 309, and possibly grave 93 could have been focal to unenclosed groups, or groups where the enclosure has not survived. It has to be acknowledged, however, that there are other larger or better-provided graves that stand in relative isolation and do not appear to have attracted subsequent satellite burials, though this hardly invalidates the concept in principle, especially in what must have been a period of social and political instability.

The notion of a focal burial seems equally applicable to the late pre-Roman Iron Age cemetery at Owslebury (Fig. 5.1; Collis, 1968, 1994), where the burials were principally grouped within two adjacent enclosures. The central burial of the earlier of the two (grave 39) was the largest, and contained an extended inhumation with full warrior panoply of sword, spear, and shield, dating around the first half of the first century BC. The focal burial of the second enclosure (grave 10) was a cremation in an urn with lid and six accessory vessels. Close by each of these burials were two other burials that also contained a notable ceramic assemblage, grave 45 adjacent to the warrior grave and grave 11 with imported *terra nigra* platters. Being slightly later in date, however, these can hardly have been focal in the sense of being founding burials of the group. Equally, the burial with most accompanying vessels, grave

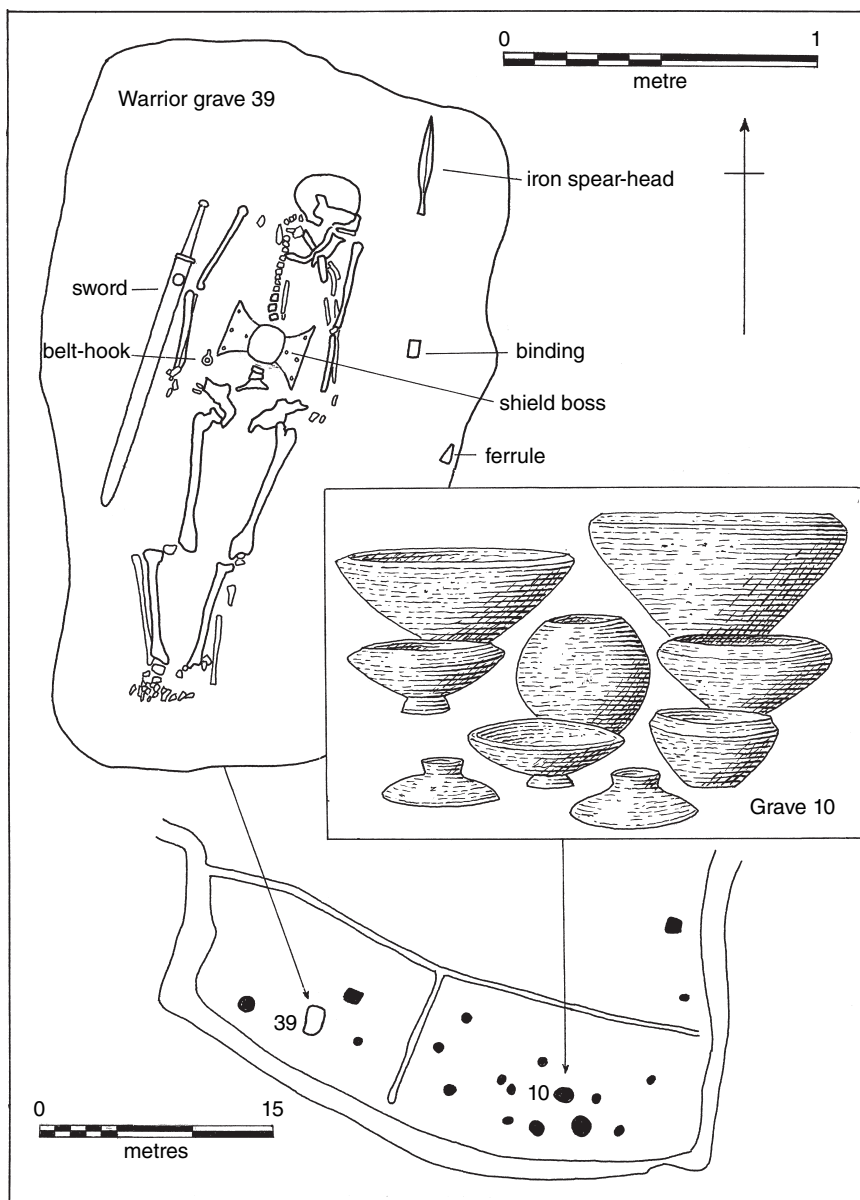


Fig. 5.1 Owslebury, Hampshire, plan of cemeteries with focal burials. Drawing adapted from Collis, 1968, 1994.

41, lay outside the enclosures in apparent isolation, having apparently attracted no subsequent satellite burials.

The designation of certain burials as 'signal' is liable to prove more controversial, since it could be argued legitimately that all burials transmit a signal of some kind. It is here used primarily in the first sense defined in the *OED* by the word's adjectival use, 'distinguished from the ordinary', and only consequentially in the second sense of 'constituting or serving as a sign'. One referee who read the proposal for this book objected that what was really meant was 'high status', which is exactly the presumption that the use of the term 'signal' was intended to avoid. The manner of burial, and more commonly the associated grave-goods, could, of course, signal high status among other things. High status is generally inferred from grave-goods that are notable either in quantity or quality, with the implication that these in some way 'belong' to the deceased. This of course raises the issue of ownership, since any credit that accrued from the conspicuous consumption of wealth, by depositing it irretrievably in a grave, depends upon whose wealth was being conspicuously consumed. Portable property may not have been owned in a capitalist sense, or accrued with the same social aspirations as in modern consumer societies. Land and built estate may have been held in the name of a kin group, and certain items of inherited portable property may equally have been held in trust by an individual by virtue of rank or position within the community. Some wealth could have been accrued personally through individual endeavour, peacefully or otherwise, but distinguishing that from communal tribute or gifts from peer groups is likely to prove contentious. So grave-goods may signal a good deal about the community and its relationship to the deceased without reflecting directly the wealth of that individual. It was precisely to avoid the glib assumption that infers social rank from artefacts that the more neutral term 'signal' was provisionally chosen.

From the above it will be apparent that focal burials, almost by definition, are signal; but signal burials may embrace a broader range of burials, which need not all be focal.

## YORKSHIRE CHARIOT BURIALS

Perhaps the most distinctive signal burials are the chariot burials of the Arras series (Fig. 5.2), concentrated in eastern Yorkshire. Numerically they represent only a very small minority of Iron Age burials in the region, though they share the square-ditched barrow plans of the more extensive cemeteries. Both square-ditched barrows and burials with two-wheeled vehicles are also characteristic of the early and middle La Tène periods in the Champagne and middle Rhine regions of north Alpine Europe, with which traditions the Arras series bears an obvious affinity, whilst at the same time displaying distinctively insular variations.

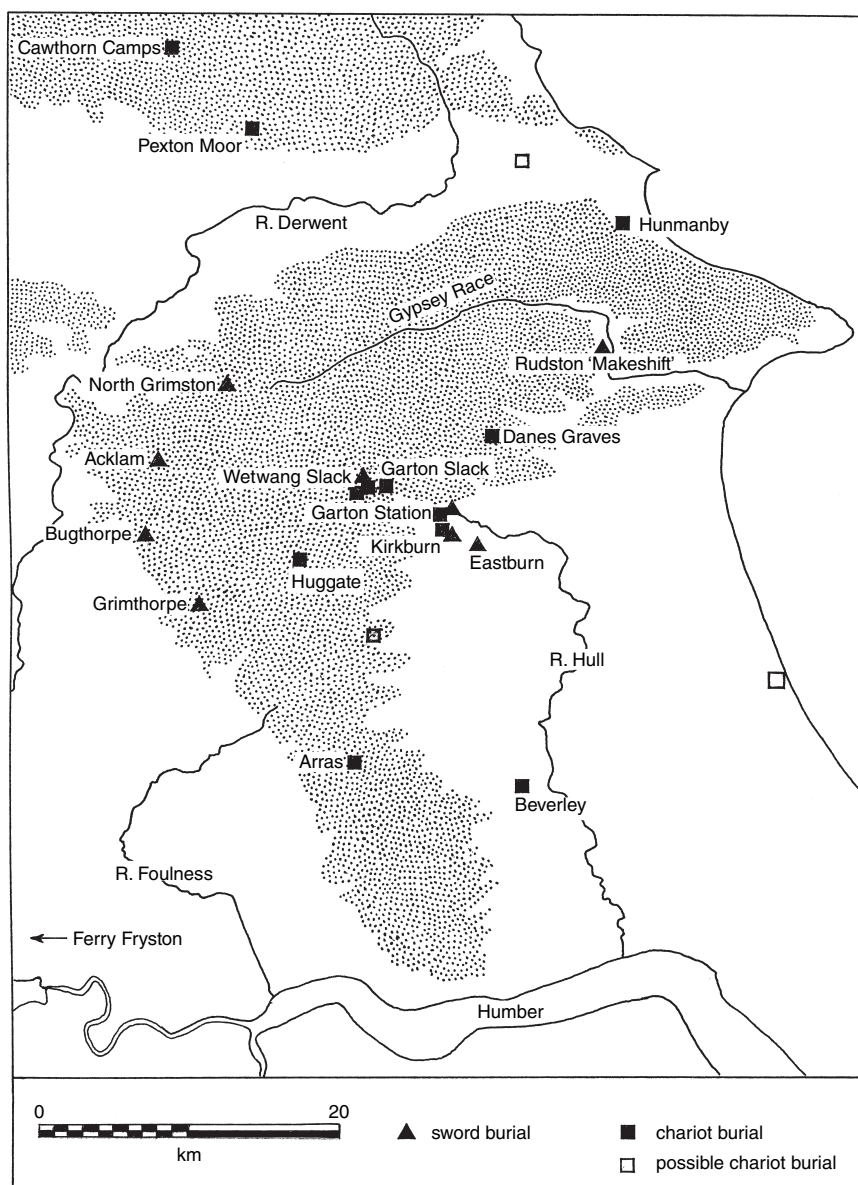


Fig. 5.2 Map of chariot burials and sword burials in eastern Yorkshire. Drawing by D. W. Harding.

The defining characteristic of the Arras chariot burials is, of course, the inclusion of the vehicle itself, though, unlike their continental counterparts, the insular examples are generally dismantled, the two wheels, betrayed by their iron tyres and the stains of wooden spokes and felloes, being placed side by side on the floor of the grave, either flanking the dead, or with the bodies laid upon them, as at Garton Slack (Brewster, 1971, 1975, 1980) and Wetwang Slack (Dent, 1985). At Garton Station exceptionally the wheels were stacked to one side of the large grave pit beside the draught pole of the chariot (Stead, 1991). Burial of the chariot intact, in the continental manner, is relatively rare, though implicit in the pair of wheel slots recorded at Pexton Moor (Stead, 1965: fig. 3). Burial 2 at Wetwang Slack had an extension to one end of the pit, which implied provision for the draft pole. Evidence for the wooden chassis, draught pole, and the position of the yoke survived at Wetwang Slack, where it appeared that the detached body of the chariot may have been placed over the deceased. Piggott (1983) maintained that the chassis would have been detachable from the axle and wheels as a matter of technological convenience, but unlike a four-wheeled wagon, the draught pole of a two-wheeled chariot must have been integral to the chassis. Other vehicle fittings in the grave assemblage include nave hoops and linch-pins. There is no tradition of burying the horse team with the chariot, either on the Continent or in Britain, so that the pair of horses from the King's Barrow at Arras remains exceptional (Stead, 1965: 89–90). Equally exceptional are the two horses buried in adjacent pits at Kirkburn (Stead, 1991). In other chariot burials, however, the horses are represented in proxy by bridle bits and terrets. In fact, apart from vehicle fittings and horse harness and occasionally weapons, grave-goods in the Yorkshire chariot burials are generally sparse, and unlike their continental counterparts they do not include imported items of drinking service.

The standard form of interment in the chariot burials is crouched inhumation, in contrast to extended inhumation, which is the norm in early and middle La Tène cemeteries in Europe. Only one individual normally is buried in the grave, so that the pair of crouched inhumations from Danes Graves (Mortimer, 1897) is exceptional. The burial can be either male or female, though male graves predominate. Apart from the artefactual assemblage, chariot burials are commonly accompanied by offerings of food, notably pig. Among older excavated chariot burials the King's Barrow and the Lady's Barrow at Arras both had remains of pig; from the modern excavated examples Garton Slack (Brewster, 1971), Wetwang Slack graves 1 and 2 (Dent, 1985: 86), Garton Station and Kirkburn (Stead, 1991), and the most recent find from Wetwang Village (Hill, 2001) all had pig bones. Apart from these, however, there is no obvious emphasis on a funerary feast or drinking.

Two of the three chariot burials discovered in adjacent square-ditched barrows at Wetwang Slack (Fig. 5.3; Dent, 1985) contained weapons, and



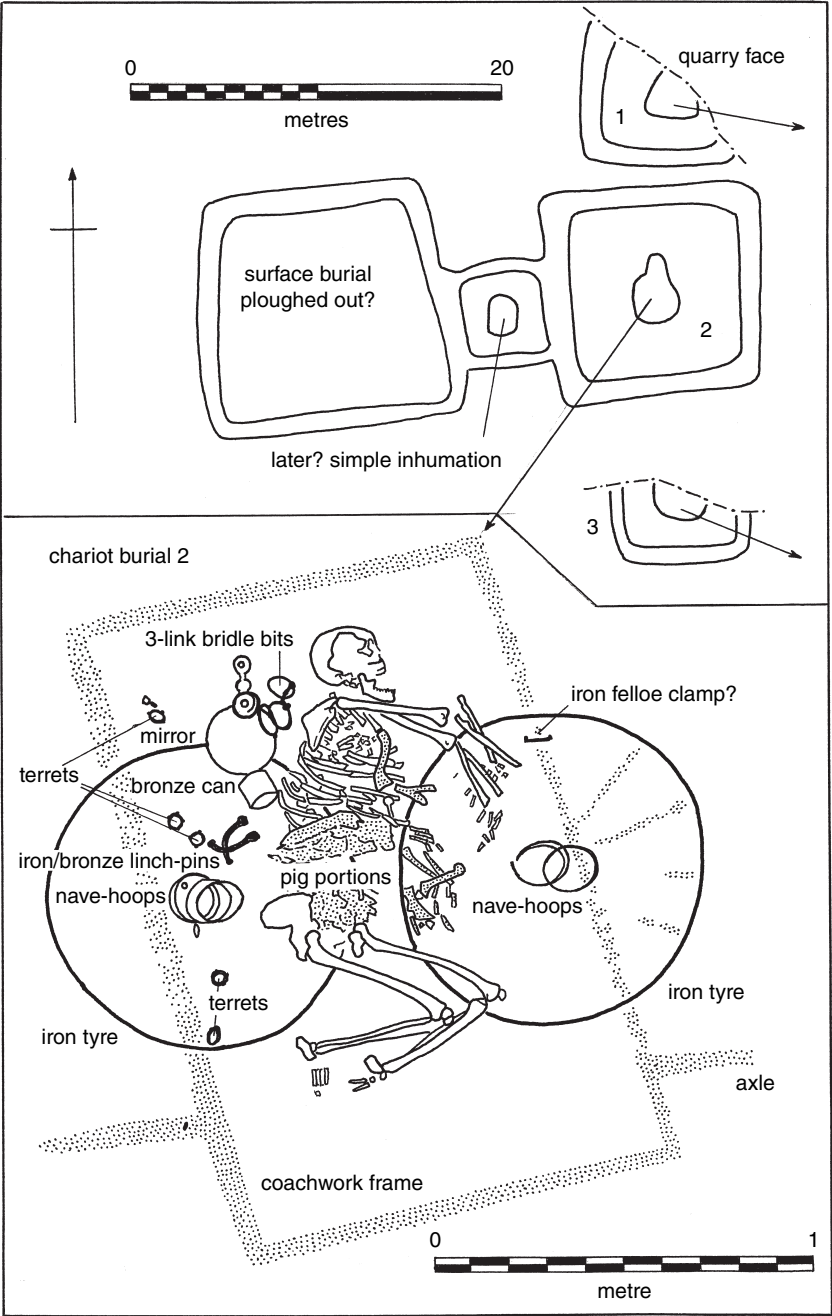


Fig. 5.3 Wetwang Slack, Yorkshire, plans of chariot burials. Drawing adapted from Dent, 1985.

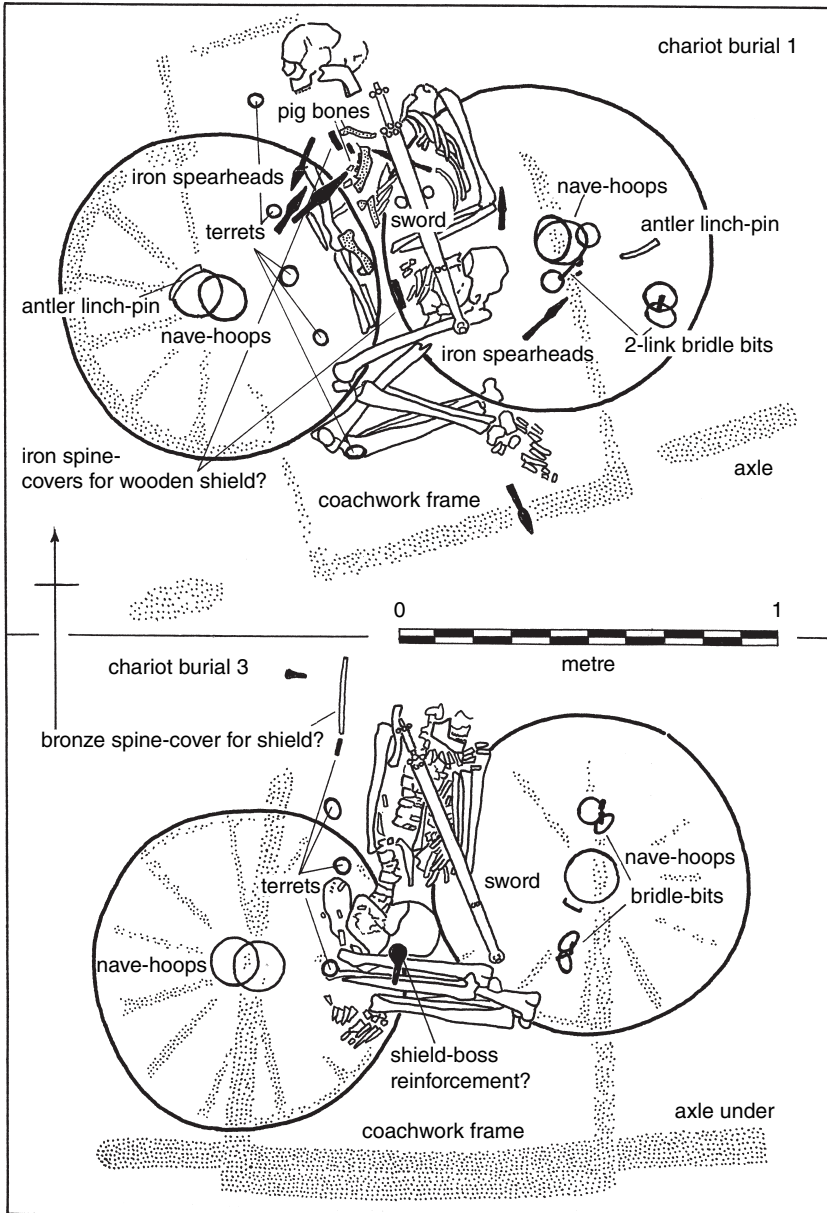


Fig. 5.3 Continued

might qualify as warrior burials. In chariot burial 1 the sword in its scabbard was laid over the body, aligned from head to foot. The scabbard, ornamented with a classical wave tendril design with balanced spiral terminals, was complete with its chape, which was essentially of La Tène 1 open-ring form, and therefore should not be later than the earlier third century BC. The suspension loop is lower on the scabbard than is normal in British swords, prompting Stead (1988: 23) to suggest that this may have been a northern English, Scottish, and Irish tradition, in which swords may have been worn over the back in a manner also common among the Celtiberians. In addition to the sword, which was clearly a prestigious weapon, there were no less than seven spearheads in the grave. Oddly, instead of being grouped, these are distributed around the body, some pointing towards it, some directly away from it. Finally, two iron half-cylinders may have been from the spine-cover of a shield, completing the warrior panoply. Chariot burial 3 from Wetwang Slack also had a sword with elaborately decorated scabbard, like its counterpart in grave 1 distinguished by an open-ring chape and low suspension mount. The ornament in this instance was not continuous, but divided into three separate panels, prompting comparison with the example from the Trent near Sutton-on-Trent, Nottinghamshire (Harding, 2007: fig. 5.7). In marked contrast to the abundance of spears from chariot burial 1, burial 3 contained none, though it too may have had a shield. The Wetwang Slack chariot burials are plainly part of a related group. They were physically located in adjacent barrows, and like the Garton Slack chariot burial they were sited apart from, but in proximity to, the more extensive square-ditch barrow cemeteries that extend along the valley.

Wetwang chariot burial 2 was notable in containing a female inhumation, like its two companions crouched across the dismantled wheels of the chariot, but instead of weaponry having a plain iron mirror. This burial has since been matched by the female inhumation from Wetwang Village (Hill, 2001; Giles and Joy, 2007: 25–7) which likewise included in its grave inventory an iron mirror. These early mirrors should be distinguished from the bronze mirrors of the first centuries BC and AD in southern England, likewise often found in burials, but of an altogether more elaborate construction and ornamentation, though their function and significance may have been similar.

The Kirkburn chariot burial was located in a group combining a pair of square-ditched barrows with two smaller round barrows. The chariot burial (K5) occupied a pit in the centre of the larger square-ditched enclosure, and comprised the usual single, flexed inhumation laid across the dismantled wheels, and surrounded by vehicle and equestrian equipment, including nave-hoops, linch-pins, terrets, strap-unions, and horse-bits. The only indication of warrior status was the coat of iron chain mail that had been draped across the body, and which, in the absence of any weaponry, could of course

have been symbolic of guardianship and protection rather than a practical item of a warrior's equipment. The more convincing warrior burial (K3) was the central feature of one of the smaller, penannular-ditched barrows, which will be discussed below.

The more recently discovered chariot burial from Ferry Fryston in west Yorkshire (Boyle et al., 2007) differs from the mainstream of 'Arras' chariot burials in one significant fact, that the chariot was buried intact rather than dismantled, and in this respect it is closer to the Pexton Moor burial among the Yorkshire series, or the more distant Newbridge, Edinburgh, chariot burial (Carter et al., 2010). In other aspects, however, it conforms to expectation; the adult male inhumation is flexed, the chariot fixtures are all in place, and the bridle gear serves in place of the two-horse team. The excavator believed, however, that the chariot was not a working vehicle, but a composite put together for the occasion, on the grounds that the wheels were not a matching pair and the terrets were too fragile for practical service. Giles (2000: 137–8) argued that this was not just a case of a vehicle 'cobbled together' from spare parts, but a deliberate attempt to combine different 'biographies' into one. The ditch filling of the square-ditched barrow was especially productive. The primary deposits including cattle bones may well have been the product of a funerary feast at the time of the interment, whilst the upper filling included a much greater quantity of animal bone dating to the third or fourth centuries AD, suggesting that the burial was still the focus of ritual feasting some 500 years or more after the original interment, which on the basis of radiocarbon dates and associated artefacts must have been in the third or second centuries BC. Significantly, the Ferry Fryston barrow is sited between two Bronze Age barrows, and indeed within a wider landscape that evidently had sacred or ceremonial connotations from an earlier period. In particular, the inner ditch of the Ferrybridge henge (Roberts, 2005b) yielded a decorated Iron Age scabbard (Stead, 2006: no. 175) that could be broadly contemporary with the chariot burial, again suggesting long continuity of ritual activity.

A recent programme of AMS radiocarbon dating of Yorkshire cemeteries (Jay et al., 2012) would appear to show that they were in use for just a generation or so around 200 cal. BC, some two centuries after the classic continental chariot burials. This conclusion may be endorsed by the fact that, whereas the iron tyres of the early continental series are generally nailed to wooden felloes, with un-nailed versions only becoming common after La Tène B2, all the Yorkshire examples are un-nailed. Whilst there is some evidence for the continuation of the practice of chariot burial in the Champagne and Ardennes regions well after its late fifth–early fourth-century heyday (Ginoux et al., 2009), this re-assessment certainly undermines older simplistic interpretations of the Arras culture as the product of immigrant settlers and perhaps reinforces Anthoens's (2010a, 2010b) alternative

explanation of the spread of the funerary rite itself. The Newbridge chariot burial, with its fifth-century dating, must have been among the earliest with unnailed tyres, but certainly should not be regarded as an 'outlier' of the Yorkshire distribution.

The continental comparanda for the chariot burials of eastern Yorkshire are generally drawn from the early and middle La Tène cemeteries of the Champagne, or from their contemporary counterparts in the Hunsrück-Eifel region of the middle Rhine. These are distinguished by feasting and drinking services that are missing from the British assemblages, and more particularly the most elaborately furnished of the continental chariot burials include southern imports, like the red-figure Attic cup, dating to around 420 BC but probably old when buried, and Etruscan bronze flagon from the warrior grave at Somme-Bionne, Marne. Some include weapons and possibly shields, and have been regarded as warrior burials. The upper burial of the double grave at Somme-Tourbe, Marne ('La Gorge Meillet'), had a long sword by his left side, together with three spears and a lance. Furthermore, the warrior's assemblage included a tall, conical helmet with short neck guard of the kind also represented at Berru, Cuperly, and Châlons-sur-Marne, a slightly less tall variant of which was also found in grave 44 at the Dürrenberg-bei-Hallein in Austria. These are sometimes ornamented, as at Berru, in the developed, fourth-century Waldalgesheim style of La Tène art, and are plainly high-status items of parade armour. A number of the continental chariot burials included offerings of pig, with Châlons-sur-Marne having a separate but immediately adjacent pit containing the whole skeleton of a boar. In sum, the continental chariot burials appear to have three distinct if interrelated elements in their assemblages, the vehicle and its accoutrements, weaponry and defensive armour, and evidence for feasting and drinking. These presumably reflected key themes in the funerary ritual rather than necessarily indicating the status or role of the individual interred in the grave, though the more modest assemblage in the British graves need not mean that the accompanying funerary ritual was any less elaborate.

It seems self-evident that chariot burials must be signal in both senses. Whether they were ever focal depends upon their spatial relationship to other burials, in which the evidence is more equivocal. They do not appear to have attracted a density of other burials around them, yet they occur in small clusters, as at Wetwang Slack and Kirkburn. At Garton Station it might appear as if the chariot burial R was part of an ordered group, except that the pattern has evidently been obscured by later Anglian activity, centred on the largest enclosure L (Stead, 1991: fig. 20). The proximity of four round barrows, each with evidence for the enigmatic 'spear ritual', might be more important than the presence of other square-ditched barrows to the north. In general, however, chariot burials do not seem to have been focal in their relationship to square-ditched barrow cemeteries.

## WEAPON OR 'WARRIOR' BURIALS

Any definition of a warrior burial in part depends upon what we accept as weapons of warfare. Swords were evidently a key weapon from the Urnfield Late Bronze Age onwards, though some swords and scabbards are elaborated to an extent that suggests they may have been designed for parade purposes rather than for actual combat. Shorter swords and daggers presumably reflect different tactics in close combat, but some may conceivably have been designed for ritual usage rather than for battle. Spears in parts of the European Iron Age represent the dominant weapon of warfare, but they must equally have been the principal weapon for hunting in the absence of widespread evidence for the use of the bow. Knives, as opposed to daggers, generally do not count, being multi-purpose, even though they could inflict serious injury. Shields have undoubtedly been under-represented in the past, since organic materials such as wood and leather are perishable, and bindings or other attachments have not always survived or been recognized. Chain mail has been found in several cases in burials, but not always with other evidence of weaponry, raising questions regarding its use and significance. Helmets are not typically found in British Iron Age graves, and the borderline between helmets and ceremonial headgear or crowns leaves room for debate. As Hunter (2005) observed, armour and headgear are found in reality far less frequently than their representation on coinage might have led us to expect.

Weaponry is a component of distinctive burials in the European Iron Age from the Hallstatt period to the late La Tène, with sword, dagger, spear, helmet, and shield represented in various combinations, not often all together. It must therefore be significant that this convention makes little or no impact on the archaeological record in Britain until the middle and later pre-Roman Iron Age (Collis, 1973). Despite the presence in Britain and Ireland of considerable numbers of Hallstatt swords of the Gündlingen variant or their derivatives, the only example apparently associated with burial is the find of 1861 from Ebberston in Yorkshire (Cowen, 1967: 396), and that remains no more than a tentative interpretation. In marked contrast to continental grave finds, the great majority of Gündlingen swords from Britain, like late Hallstatt and early La Tène daggers, came from rivers, from Thames and Trent to Tyne and Tay, prompting again the idea that burials or surrogate burials may have been deposited in rivers. For the middle Iron Age Hawkes (Clarke and Hawkes, 1955) had identified the Shouldham, Norfolk, anthropoid sword, found with an extended inhumation, as his Class B1, which he dated to the late third century, whilst the Class F examples from Yorkshire, from the Clothesholme inhumation grave and from North Grimston, where the inhumation also included a long iron sword of Piggott's (1950) Group II, he had assigned to the later second century. But otherwise most of the Romanizing anthropoid series were demonstrably late.

Among the earliest sword burials in Britain are those from the Wetwang chariot burials and from Kirkburn K3 (Fig. 5.4B), the dating of which was conventionally based upon their style of scabbard ornament and the typology of their chapes. The Kirkburn scabbard, like those from Wetwang Slack, has an open-ring chape of La Tène 1 derivation, but its design of scroll with alternating tendrils incorporates motifs, such as the three-sided curving vortex with simple linear hatching, to induce an effect of interplay between foreground and background, that anticipates later insular styles (Harding, 2007). The decoration of the chape, however, is plainly by a different hand from that responsible for the ornament of the scabbard plate, so that we may infer that the scabbard is a composite piece, cherished and repaired over generations. The sword in its elaborately decorated scabbard was placed hilt downwards beside the flexed inhumation, but more puzzling are the three spearheads that appear to have been driven into the grave filling directly above the chest of the deceased. This appears to be another example of the 'spearing' ritual that is also exemplified at Garton Station, and which will be discussed below.

Without scabbards, the swords themselves are seldom diagnostic in terms of dating. In the Rudston (Makeshift) cemetery no less than ten burials, not all of which might qualify as warrior burials, were accompanied by swords, nine had spears, and four had shields (Stead, 1991). Apart from instances of multiple spearheads of 'spear ritual' graves, there are other instances of spears placed in graves as accompanying weapons, though sometimes the spearhead has been pressed into the side or end of the grave in order to accommodate the shaft. Grave R154 is of interest in view of its inclusion of blacksmith's tools, a large pair of iron tongs and an iron hammer-head, as well as a sword and pair of spearheads. King (2010) suggested that combat had become ritualized by the middle Iron Age, so that the inclusion of weapons did not necessarily reflect their practical use in life. On the other hand, Giles (2012: 168) pointed out that weapons were more commonly found in the graves of young adults in the Yorkshire cemeteries, which might argue in favour of their being victims of actual combat. At Rudston the incidence of weapons in the graves of those in the 17–25 and 25–35 age brackets was in fact equal (Stead, 1991), but weapons seldom occurred in graves of older individuals, R107 being a positively venerable exception.

Before the excavation of the Burton Fleming-Rudston cemeteries, sword burials had been assigned to a separate North Grimston cultural group, distributed along the western edge of the Yorkshire Wolds (Stead, 1965). Though now accepted as part of a multi-faceted Arras culture, the burials at Grimthorpe, Bugthorpe, and North Grimston, together with the more recent find from Acklam Wold (Dent, 1983), still stand out like sentinels on the western fringes of the main distribution of square-ditched barrow cemeteries, as if intended to signal the borders of the Arras territory (compare Figs 3.12 and 5.2). The inhumation uncovered in 1868 in a chalk quarry at Grimthorpe

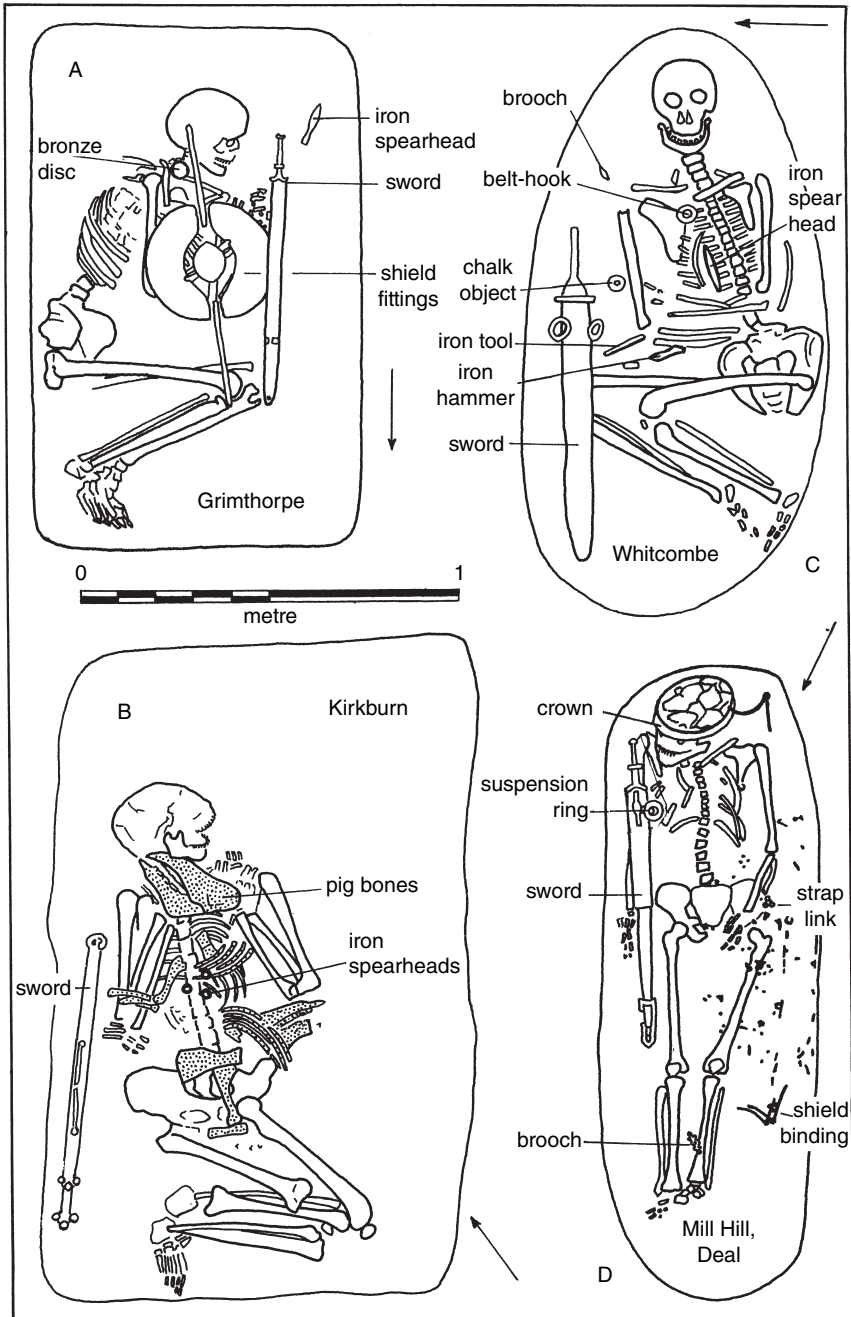


Fig. 5.4 Warrior burials, A, Grimthorpe, Yorkshire, B, Kirkburn, Yorkshire, C, Whitcombe, Dorset, D, Mill Hill, Deal, Kent. Drawings adapted from Stead, 1968 and 1991; Aitken and Aitken, 1990; and Parfitt, 1995.



in Yorkshire (Fig. 5.4A; Mortimer, 1869, 1905; Stead, 1968) was one of four in a small group apparently located just within the confines of the hillfort rampart, though they probably post-date its abandonment. The grave group included sword, spear, and shield, though Stead's reconstruction drawing was conjectural, based upon the accounts of the excavator. Though the bronze chape is essentially of La Tène 2 form, with incipient 'fish-lips' terminals which are characteristic of sword-chapes in north-eastern England and south-eastern Scotland, both Stead (1968: 180) and Jope (2000) regarded it as relatively late, perhaps even early first century BC. Its late dating perhaps was inferred by comparison with the Bugthorpe scabbard, not certainly but probably from a grave, on which the decoration inevitably provokes comparison with south-eastern mirror ornament. The three-sided curving void motif against a background of squared basketry-hatching certainly anticipates the mirror style, but we have already noted the same device for creating interplay between foreground and background on the Kirkburn scabbard, which must belong to the earlier third century.

North Grimston, discovered in 1902 and investigated by J. R. Mortimer, was of an extended inhumation, buried with joints of pig in the Arras convention. It is unique in having two swords, one long iron sword of Piggott's group 2 and a shorter anthropoid weapon of Hawkes's class F, both probably dating to the second century BC. Hawkes (Clarke and Hawkes, 1955: 205) argued that the longer, heavier sword was for slashing, whereas the shorter anthropoid version was for 'thrust-and-parry fighting', hence the particular need for a hilt that would prevent the weapon from being knocked from the grasp of the warrior in combat. The two weapon types therefore were designed for different modes of fighting. In contrast to the shift in fighting conventions from long swords in Hallstatt C cemeteries in central Europe to shorter weapons in Hallstatt D, in middle-late La Tène Europe, as in Britain, the two forms seemingly existed side by side. It is perhaps surprising, therefore, that there are not more graves in Britain with both sword types.

The Acklam burial (Dent, 1983; Stead, 2006: 189) contained just the sword and a bone toggle, but it is noteworthy on two accounts. First the sword, apparently in its wooden scabbard at the time of deposition, was bent double, a well-documented phenomenon in the continental Iron Age, where it is regarded as ritually symbolic. Second, the back of the skull showed signs of deep sword cuts, which were presumably the cause of death. None of the four key Yorkshire sword burials appears to have been part of a larger cemetery, and all four are located along the western edge of the Wolds, so that Stead's original recognition of them as a signally distinct group within the Arras series may not have been so mistaken.

One of the most remarkable sword burials from Iron Age Britain is grave 112 from Mill Hill, Deal (Fig. 3.6; Parfitt, 1995), where a slightly built adult male occupied a sub-rectangular, elongated pit cut into the chalk (Fig. 5.4D).

The sword in its scabbard had been placed face down parallel to the extended inhumation. The scabbard chape was of La Tène 2 type, and the bronze scabbard plate had a high campanulate profile, higher than that of the hilt end of the essentially La Tène 1 sword, so that Stead (1995: 59) inferred that sword and scabbard were not an original pair. On the lower left side was a hide-shaped shield, which, from the position of its bronze bindings, the excavator concluded had been broken by folding double at the time of deposition. Most notably, however, the head was wearing a bronze head-piece or crown, the horizontal band of which was ornamented with a scroll design, and which originally had a half-hoop over the top in a manner not unlike other putative examples of Iron Age and Romano-British crowns. A bronze brooch, ornamented with coral inlay, rested between the ankles, where it seems unlikely to have served as a dress-fastening, but where it could have closed the end of a shroud.

Grave 112 might be claimed as focal as well as signal, because its dating to the late third or early second century BC places it at the head of a series of inhumation burials in two adjacent cemeteries over the next two centuries. Its own alignment on an earlier Bronze Age barrow (Fig. 3.6) suggests an awareness of an even longer tradition of sanctity of the site. In the case of the Mill Hill interment, it might appear from the skeletal evidence that the deceased was not the build of a natural warrior, and the association with the crown certainly raises the possibility that the grave-goods were symbols of elite rank rather than indicative of martial occupation.

An unequivocal warrior burial in the central European La Tène tradition was grave 39 from Owslebury (Fig. 5.1; Collis, 1968), an extended inhumation which, as we have seen, was chronologically primary and spatially focal to the smaller of two cemetery groups. Late La Tène inhumations in Britain nevertheless tend to show a preference for a crouched rather than supine posture, as was seemingly the case at St Lawrence in the Isle of Wight (Jones and Stead, 1969), where a burial that was badly disturbed by construction work was accompanied by an iron sword 946 mm in total length in its scabbard. It was accompanied by three iron suspension rings, and iron fittings for the central boss and spine of a wooden shield. A similar assemblage accompanied grave 9 of the Durotrigan cemetery at Whitcombe (Fig. 5.4C; Aitken and Aitken, 1990), comprising long iron sword with an organic scabbard, of which only the mouth-binding survived, and two iron rings from an associated suspension loop. The sword was placed against the knees of the crouched inhumation, which also had an iron spearhead resting on its chest. With a total length of 930 mm, the sword is one of the longest late La Tène examples, and exceptionally wide at 77 mm, though technological examination indicated that it would have been perfectly serviceable (Lang, 2006: 96–7), provided that its user had the necessary physique to handle it. In this case this would have been unlikely in later life, given that the individual, in common with several others

in the cemetery, suffered from spinal osteoarthritis. Of particular interest, however, are the other artefactual associations, which included an iron hammer-head and an iron file, leading Stead (1990: 75) to identify the deceased as a warrior-craftsman, citing by way of comparison the warrior-surgeon from München-Obermenzing (de Navarro, 1955) among others. Dating was based largely on a La Tène 2 derivative brooch of a type usually assigned to the early first century AD, but for which Hawkes (Hawkes and Hull, 1987: Type 3C) did not exclude a late first-century BC introduction. Accordingly, the grave could have belonged to the beginning of the cemetery's use, so once again could have served a focal role.

Weaponry was not in general a feature of burials of the Welwyn series, though Collis (1973) included as warrior burials those with just a shield, which allowed Snailwell to be counted, as indeed its excavator had maintained (Lethbridge, 1953), together with Stanfordbury A, on the basis of their bronze bosses. The provision of a shield without any offensive weaponry seems to signal a rather different message from the full warrior panoply, however, and could have been symbolic rather than indicative of warrior status. The one clear example of a warrior burial, associated with a pair of pedestal vases of Aylesford–Swarling type, was that discovered in 1982 at Kelvedon in Essex (Sealey, 2007), barely a mile from the later Iron Age settlement (Rodwell, 1988). No trace of the burial itself was found, and the grave-goods may have been damaged by circumstances of discovery. Nevertheless, an iron sword with copper alloy scabbard, fragmentary dagger, massive spearhead with ferrule, and a band-shaped shield boss attested to the burial's warrior status, while an early Roman bronze bowl and fragments including the bronze handle of a small, stave-built wooden tankard provided suitably prestigious accompaniments. Both sword fragments and spear had been bent, possibly in antiquity, perhaps like Acklam as a ritual actual at deposition. Furthermore, Stead (2006: no. 105) raised doubts as to whether the sword would have fitted into the narrow scabbard, perhaps suggesting a symbolic or formulaic combination rather than a practical, working set of weapons.

Despite classic cemeteries like Aylesford and Swarling, Kent has not until recently yielded as much funerary evidence of the immediately pre-Roman period as its geographical importance in the period might have led us to expect. So the Brisley Farm warrior burials (Fig. 5.5; Johnson and Stevenson, 2004; Stevenson, 2012, 2013, 2014) are notable, both for their individual layout and contents and for their immediate context. Both burials were within square-ditched barrows, around which was an enclosure that apparently yielded evidence of feasting in the form of animal bone and broken pottery from its ditch, and especially around its south-facing entrance. A circular building within the enclosure was provisionally interpreted as a mortuary house, and a six-post structure adjacent to the second, later burial as a possible exposure platform. Both inhumations were extended, the earlier with head to

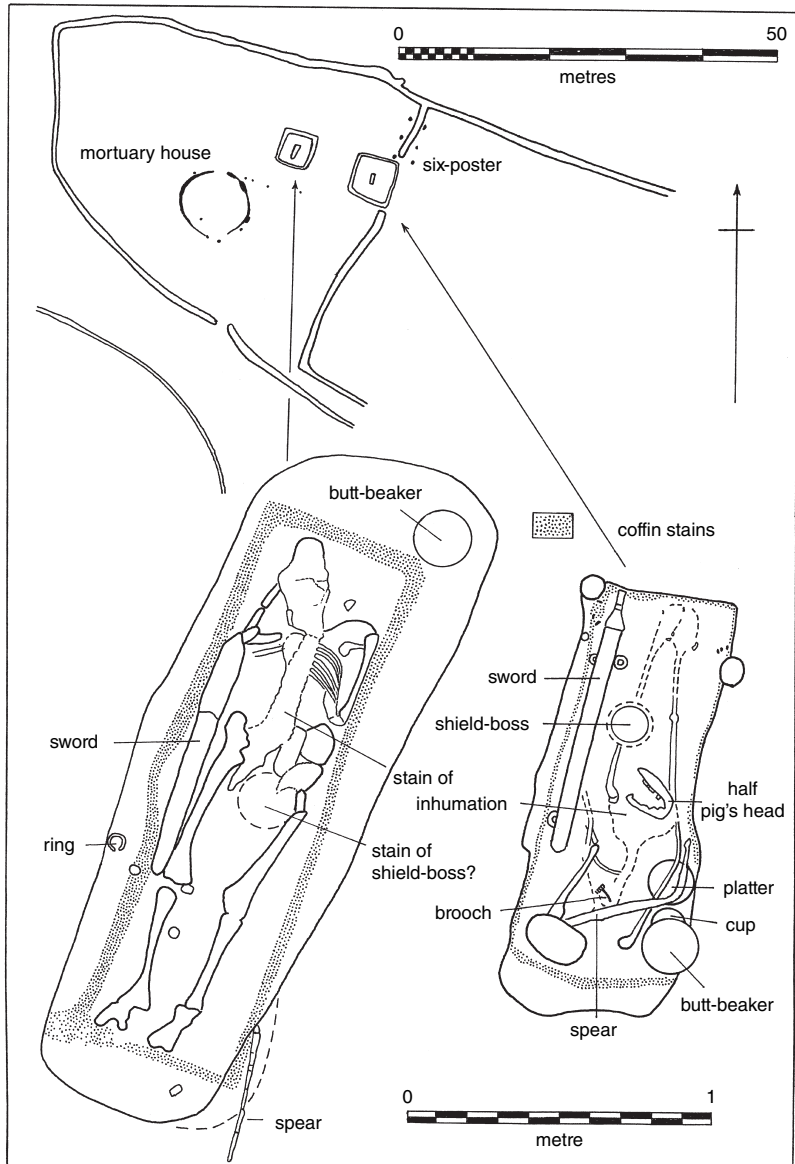


Fig. 5.5 Brisley Farm, Ashford, Kent, enclosure plan with warrior burials. Drawing adapted from Stevenson, 2012, 2013, and 2014.

the north and later with head to the south, though the posture of both could be determined only in outline from the stains of the decayed remains. The earlier burial, substantially the larger individual of the two, was interred in a wooden or basketry coffin, long iron sword at the right side with hilt at the shoulder,

and over the lower body a shield of which only the stain of a central boss survived. A spear was included in the grave, but not in the coffin, and owing to its length had been pushed into the side of the grave pit, as has been observed elsewhere. Also outside the coffin was an imported butt-beaker dating between the close of the first century BC and the first decade of the first century AD. The later burial once again raises doubts regarding the attribution of warrior status. The individual was only around 1.57m tall (5' 2"), and would surely have had difficulty wielding a sword nearly two-thirds his own height, while the fact that the sword was placed alongside but with its hilt at the feet end of the deceased surely affords a negative signal. Again there was a spear, the blade of which had been bent to a right-angle, an action that was hardly undertaken simply to make it fit the grave, and one that must surely be interpreted as symbolic. Like the earlier burial, the lower parts of the body were covered by a shield, but, unlike its companion, this grave was provided with food and drink with cup, butt-beaker, and imported *terra nigra* platter with maker's stamp, dating to the second quarter of the first century AD, and half a pig's head. There was apparently no evidence that these two burials formed part of a larger cemetery, but the area remained the focus for a sanctuary or shrine into the Roman occupation.

The 2012 find from Bridge near Canterbury (Farley et al., 2014), dating to the mid-first century BC, is exceptional, and doubly so because the cremation, probably in a leather pouch closed by a brooch, was contained within a hemispherical bronze helmet, unique in the British Iron Age, but of a type well known in continental Europe. Equally novel in the British Iron Age is the isolated warrior grave from North Bersted in West Sussex (Taylor, 2008), which contained the remains of a Roman helmet of Montefortino type in an inhumation burial dated on the basis of three large jars deposited as grave-goods to the mid-first century BC. Other grave-goods included a possible shield boss and bronze openwork mounting. It has been suggested that aristocratic, pro-Roman families in Britain at this period may have been in liaison with Rome and thereby acquired goods that were buried with them as a sign of their adopted allegiance.

Though the Yorkshire sword burials may be seen as one facet of the Arras burial tradition, the late Iron Age sword burials of southern and south-eastern Britain cannot readily be equated to any one regional funerary pattern. Some Durotrigan burials, as we have seen, include weapons, and the Bryher burial in the Isles of Scilly was unique in combining sword and mirror. In northern Britain we may note two relatively recent finds of weapon burials in cists in lowland Scotland, one at Marshall, Alloa (Mills, 2004), the other at Dunbar. The Alloa warrior was wearing a scabbard from his belt, but the sword had been withdrawn and placed hilt upwards on his body, perhaps gripped by the deceased as if ever alert. A spear had also been included, with blade at the foot of the grave. Unusually, this warrior also had personal dress-fastenings and

ornaments, including a pin near the shoulder for fastening a linen garment or shroud and two copper alloy rings on his toes. The Dunbar warrior burial (Roy, 2005, 2006) was in fact a secondary interment in a cist-grave. The primary burial, a substantially disarticulated adult skeleton with pin, had been shifted to one end of the grave to make room for the flexed inhumation, also with a pin, which had been placed on the sword with the spear alongside. Absolute dating is uncertain, but the two could have been buried within a generation of each other, and it would be tempting to suspect a kin relationship.

## BURIALS IN SPECIAL ENCLOSURES

Spanning the period of the conquest when there appears to have been a heightened level of funerary and ritual activity is the Folly Lane complex at Verulamium (Niblett, 1999). In Period 3, shortly after the invasion, a rectilinear ditched enclosure was constructed in which elaborate funerary rituals were seemingly performed. The compound's special purpose is itself signalled, as we have seen, by the presence in the ditch on either side of its entrance of human burials. Within the enclosure the principal structure was a subterranean rectangular timber shaft with surrounding walk-way, within a timber revetment so substantially constructed that it must have been intended to remain open for a considerable time. On the floor of the shaft was a mass of pottery—fragments from at least forty vessels—that might have been the residue from a ceremonial feast, together with some fragments of metalwork and cremated human bone. Stamps from imported southern Gaulish samian and Italic *amphorae* indicated a date-span between AD 45 and AD 65. The shaft nevertheless had not been the site of the cremation, nor that of the final interment of the remains. Adjacent to its north-west side was an area of re-deposited subsoil, presumably from the construction of the pit, the surface of which was severely scorched, and in which fragments of copper alloy were embedded. This was interpreted by the excavator as the pyre site. Just to the north-east of the shaft was the burial pit itself, filled with a mass of burnt debris, including scraps of copper, silver, and iron, *amphorae* sherds, and a small quantity of cremated bone. On the surface were two enamelled fragments, one from a two-link horse-bit, the other from a toggle.

Following the principal funerary event, the shaft had been systematically and thoroughly demolished, not in the excavator's view an act of hostile violence but of definitive closure at the end of the funerary ritual. If the site's primary purpose was indeed funerary, the most plausible function of this elaborate construction would be for the laying out in state of some notable personage, in order that mourners could process around to pay respects. Access would plainly have been restricted and concealed from view by the mass of the

community, unlike the pyre itself, which from this prominent location would have been visible far and wide. Some time may have been necessary in order to determine the succession, or to allow time to assemble the dependent community, or simply to await an auspicious time or season to complete the rituals, a process that might take months or longer.

An alternative interpretation, nevertheless, is possible. The cremated remains in the burial pit were admittedly minimal, and there were no intact grave-goods to accompany the pyre debris. By the end of the first century AD the site became that not of a regular cemetery, but of a temple of cella-with-ambulatory plan, prompting comparison with the layout of the subterranean timber structure of Period 3. Ritual deposits in pits, human and animal, rather than formal burials, continued to be made until the third century. It seems possible, therefore, that the enclosure was a ritual site in the pre-Roman period, but not necessarily funerary. The rituals practised here may have included cremation, but we need not assume that this was the primary function. If indeed the site was a sacred one, then its violent and systematic destruction shortly after the conquest would come as no surprise. The absence of overt evidence of Roman intervention would hardly be surprising, since almost certainly forced labour would have been used to underscore the humiliation. The immediately pre-Roman period witnessed a number of extravagant burial sites in this part of eastern England, some no doubt the tangible articulation of chauvinistic identity by ruling local elites. But that expression of identity need not have been restricted to burial, and if combined with religious zeal it could have been an even more potent force for native resistance, and for that reason a target for suppression more than burial practices alone.

A site where conspicuous burial was certainly a key function was Stanway, just west of the dyke complex at Camulodunum, Colchester (Crummy et al., 2007). A funerary compound had been established here in the second half of the first century BC, but it was not until the mid-first century AD and the period following the conquest that a series of conspicuously furnished burials were deposited within the extended complex. Of particular interest are those in which associated grave-goods suggest a particular role for the deceased, notably the warrior's burial and the inkwell burial in Enclosure 1, and the doctor's burial in Enclosure 5. The doctor's burial chamber (Fig. 5.6) was divided into two levels by a wooden partition, the eastern half containing a dining set and drinking service, the western half reserved for specialist equipment such as surgical instruments and divining rods, together with a gaming-board with pieces set to the opening moves. The cremated remains, just 158 gm in weight, were piled on the gaming-board. A single wine *amphora* stood in the south-west corner. The whole ensemble was apparently protected by a wooden cover. The surgical instruments, which included scalpels, retractors, forceps, and saw, presumably for bone surgery, possibly including trepanation (Roberts and McKinley, 2003), must surely point to the deceased being a

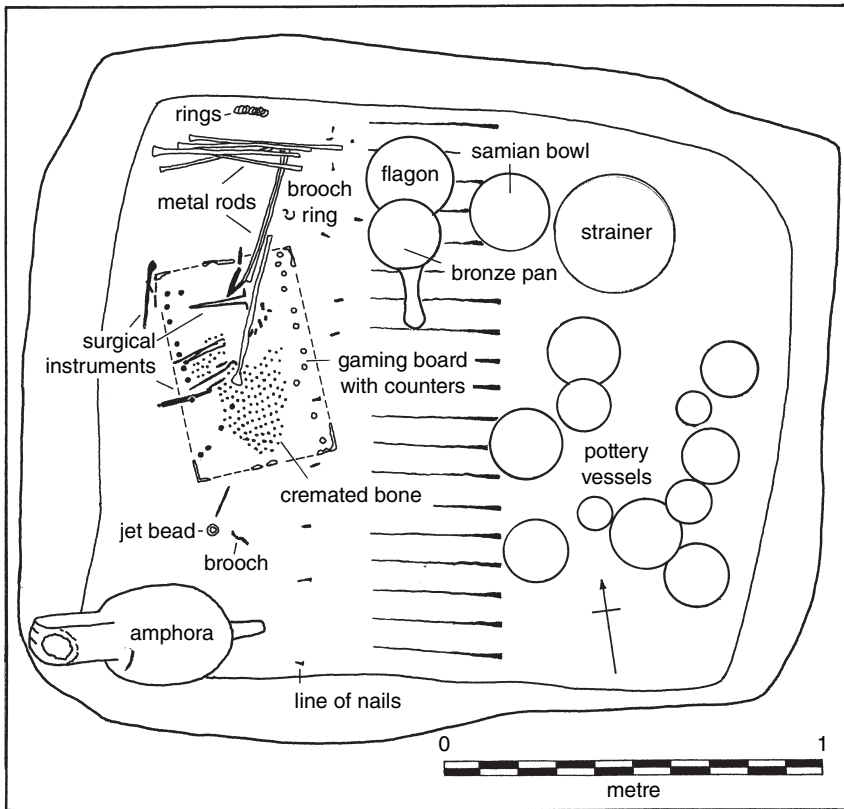


Fig. 5.6 Stanway, Colchester, Essex, plan of 'doctor's grave'. Drawing adapted from Crummy et al., 2007.

doctor, even though the divination rods suggest that medical and spiritual arts were closely entwined. Though the closest parallels for these instruments might be from Roman contexts, surgery was evidently practised from earlier Iron Age times, as the middle La Tène 'doctor's' grave from München-Obermenzing testified (de Navarro, 1955), though the Stanway doctor seemingly was not a military surgeon, as the Bavarian grave-assemblage implies. Any suggestion that the Stanway doctor was a druid seems entirely hypothetical, since classical sources do not list medical skills or divination among their attributes. Nevertheless, writing in the later first century AD, Pliny bracketed healers with druids and seers as groups that had been suppressed in Gaul by Tiberius, and claimed that, even in his time, the magical arts were in Britain still the focus of ritual veneration (*Naturalis Historia*, 30, iv), which certainly accords with the grandeur of the Stanway burial.



If the Stanway warrior's and doctor's burials warrant those names, then the 'inkwell' burial should surely have been the scribe's or the clerk's. Apart from the inkwell, there was no stylus, so the excavators presumed that reed pens may have been included, which, like the wooden box attested by its copper alloy fittings, would have perished. What this individual was recording is, of course, unknown, but it could as likely have been commercial inventories, in view of the evidence for import of Gaulish goods, as poetic verses, though presumably not religious texts, as the druids reportedly abjured literacy. Relevant in this context are the seven pottery vessels from the central chamber in Enclosure 3 with graffiti, attesting to a limited degree of pragmatic literacy among the Stanway elite.

Apart from these burials, a key component of the Stanway complex was the plank-lined chambers, notably BF6 (Fig. 2.5), BF24, and CF 42 in Enclosures 3, 4, and 5 respectively. The filling of these was characterized by the scatter of broken pottery and other fragmentary artefacts, but not apparently from the pyre. BF6 and BF24 also included small quantities of cremated bone, but the function of these chambers in relation to the larger mortuary compounds in Enclosures 4 and 5, and to the more formal cremation graves, is unclear. Once again we are dealing with a complex funerary process in which the cremated remains of the dead may have been distributed in more than one act of deposition.

There can be little doubt that the Enclosure 3–5 complex at Stanway represents a highly select group that was physically segregated from the apparently lower-status burials on Site D. The ready adoption of Gaulish imports of the finest quality for its funerary accompaniments may indicate a flourishing trading relationship with Gallo-Roman partners, but it need not mean that the local ruling elite had been schooled in Rome or that they were effectively puppet place-men of Rome (Creighton, 2006). There were doubtless powerful pro-Roman factions in Britain in the decades before the conquest, but equally surely strong anti-Roman forces as well, and the fact that native elites chose to include Gallo-Roman and Roman goods in their ostentatious funerary and ceremonial assemblages need not mean that they were all political quislings.

Certain of the features of the Stanway burial enclosures are replicated at Baldock, where the California large enclosure contained at least one focal burial, located centrally, with evidence also for a late pre-Roman Iron Age funerary pyre (Fitzpatrick-Matthews and Burleigh, 2007). The central pit, which was divided into two sections, contained minimal trace of human bone, which may therefore have been collected separately for distribution, but it did contain a range of animal bone, including horse, sheep/goat, cattle, bird, and notably pig. All the horse bone comprised teeth or foot bones, prompting the suggestion that the funerary rites may have included a horse-hide or head-and-hooves ritual. Metalwork included copper fragments of Alpine or central European origin, while the majority of the iron was from a

suit of chain mail. Among the artefactual assemblage was a wooden bucket of yew staves, bound with ornamented copper alloy bands, and with three projecting feet. There were also six satellite graves that contained little bone but were accompanied by one or two pottery vessels, none imports and all dating to the end of the first century BC. There were several lesser enclosures in the Baldock complex, including two excavated by Stead (Stead and Rigby, 1986), so that there is no clear-cut differentiation between rectilinear enclosures containing signal burials and those that, like the King Harry Lane enclosures, may contain a focal burial, but none of signal character.

In continental Europe a site that invites comparison with these special enclosed funerary sites is the complex at Clemency in Luxembourg (Fig. 5.7; Metzler et al., 1991), close to the important *oppidum* of the Treveri at the Titelberg. The principal cremation deposit was in a rectangular pit with wooden lining, at more than 4 metres square substantially larger than standard graves, and containing around ten imported *amphorae*, an iron roasting-grill, a bronze bowl with ring-handles, and a Campanian pottery lamp, together with over two dozen accessory vessels. The excavators believed that the Clemency tomb had been robbed shortly after construction, resulting in the breakage and loss of some of the contents, but in the light of the British evidence it is possible that symbolic destruction was part of a more complex funerary ritual. The grave-goods were evidently carefully choreographed, with *amphorae* in the south-east corner and pig teeth, the remnants of at least four hogs, in the south-west. The cremated remains were concentrated in the north of the chamber and, unlike the British graves, amounted to a near-complete deposit, assuming only one individual was represented. The burial chamber, which had been covered with a low mound, was located centrally in a rectilinear enclosure, which appeared to have been constructed as a final act of closure as it overlay some of the remains of funerary activities, which extended beyond its precincts. Principal among these was a pyre site, and an arrangement of five postholes that may have supported a structure on which the deceased was laid prior to cremation. This latter area was subsequently strewn with fragments of broken *amphorae* as if to create a form of paved surface. Other pits contained the calcined bone fragments of horses, cattle, and pigs, all evidently part of an elaborate funerary ritual. On the basis of the *amphorae*, including types intermediate between Dressel 1A and 1B, the excavators favoured a dating around the second quarter of the first century BC.

## WELWYN AND LEXDEN-TYPE BURIALS

Among the late pre-Roman Iron Age cemeteries of south-eastern England are a number of richly equipped graves of the period between Caesar and Claudius

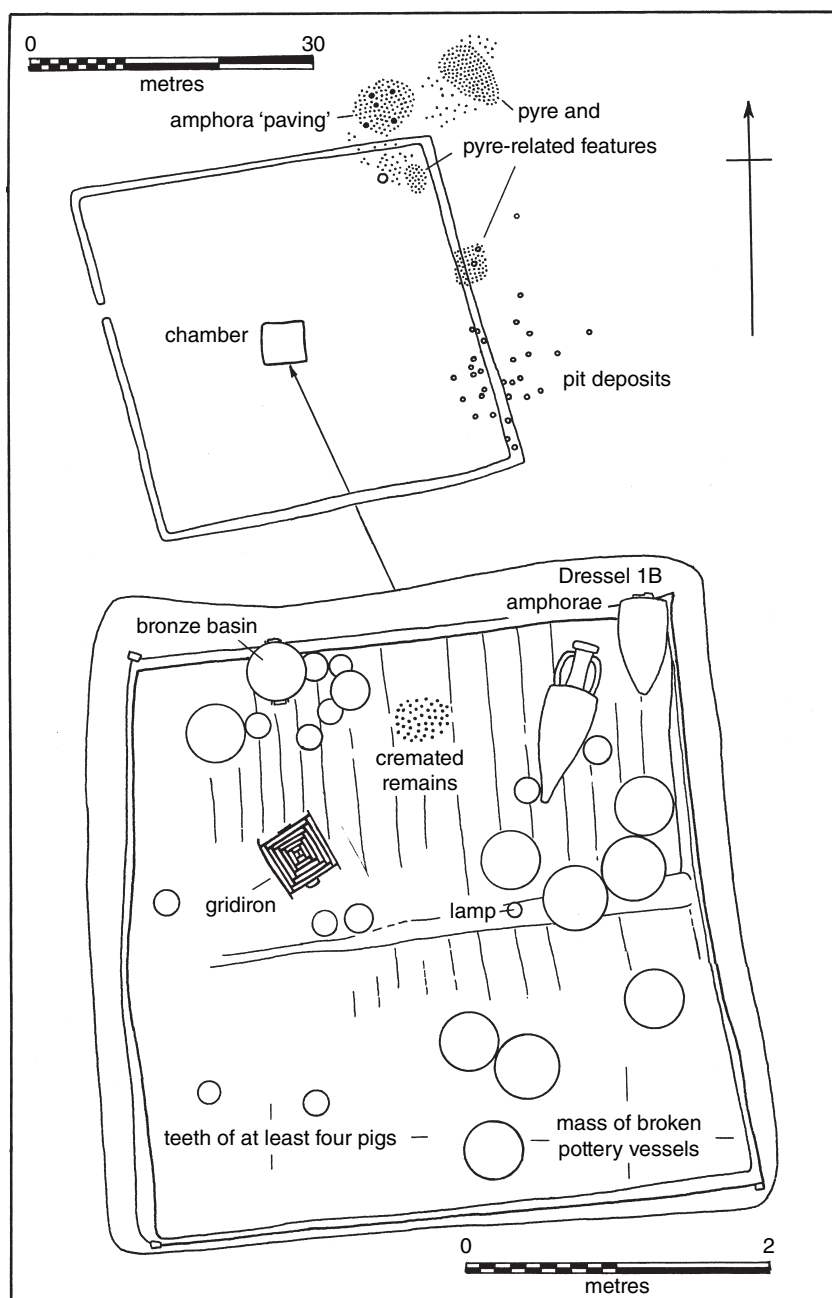


Fig. 5.7 Clemency, Luxembourg, plan of funerary enclosure and burial chamber. Drawing adapted from Metzler et al., 1991.

north of the Thames, which Stead (1976) divided into an earlier, Welwyn group (c.50–10 BC) and a later Lexden group (c.15/10 BC–AD 50). Among early finds was a pair of graves uncovered in 1906 from Welwyn (Smith, 1912), one of which produced a pair of silver cups of Mediterranean origin that was almost exactly matched by fragments from another grave from Welwyn Garden City, uncovered by development in 1965 (Stead, 1967). The overriding theme of these burials is the comforts of hearth and home. Wine is stored in *amphorae*, in the case of Welwyn Garden City no less than five stacked along the side of the grave pit (Fig. 5.8A), while Sir Henry Dryden (1845) recorded six, now lost, from one of the Stanfordbury graves in Bedfordshire. The wine service included the best imported Italic flagons, strainers, and other bronze vessels. Joints of meat were only recorded at Snailwell, but in most cases the circumstances of discovery could have resulted in the loss of crucial evidence. In any event, the presence of dining services in local and imported wares implies a funerary feast, and the fact that the vessels at Welwyn Garden City were set out individually, rather than stacked, suggests they may have contained provisions. Some graves like Mount Bures near Colchester and Stanfordbury had a pair of iron firedogs with bulls' head finials, while the Welwyn graves each had single examples. Finally, leisure was served by a board-game at Welwyn Garden City, with twenty-four gaming pieces in four different colours. One curious feature of the Welwyn Garden City grave was the recovery from the cremated remains of fragments of bear phalanges, indicating that the body had been wrapped in a bear-skin for cremation, a feature shared by the Baldock Tene burial (Stead and Rigby, 1986: 53). Notably absent from the grave inventories are weapons, and as Stead pointed out, personal ornaments are also not a regular feature of Welwyn-type burials. This is surely significant. Wealthy as the grave accompaniments may be, they convey nothing personal regarding the deceased. Unlike Stanway, where we might tentatively identify a warrior (or hunter), doctor, scribe, and perhaps ladies (with brooches and mirror), the occupants of the Welwyn series of graves for the most part remain wholly anonymous. So whatever they signal, it does not in general relate to the deceased personally.

The basic design of the Welwyn series of graves comprises a rectangular or sub-rectangular pit. There is no surviving evidence for a timber chamber or roof, though the Welwyn Garden City grave did appear to have a partition of some kind dividing the unurned cremation deposit from the associated grave-goods, much as the doctor's grave at Stanway was internally divided. The Snailwell grave pit (Fig. 5.8B) was distinguished by having a wooden framework, perhaps of a litter, the position of which was indicated by angle irons at its four corners and iron rivets along its sides. The cremated remains had been placed in the centre, perhaps in a bag or organic container. Next to it was a spiral bronze armlet with snake terminals, a unique outlier of a series whose distribution lies in eastern Scotland (MacGregor, 1976: 116 and map 16). The

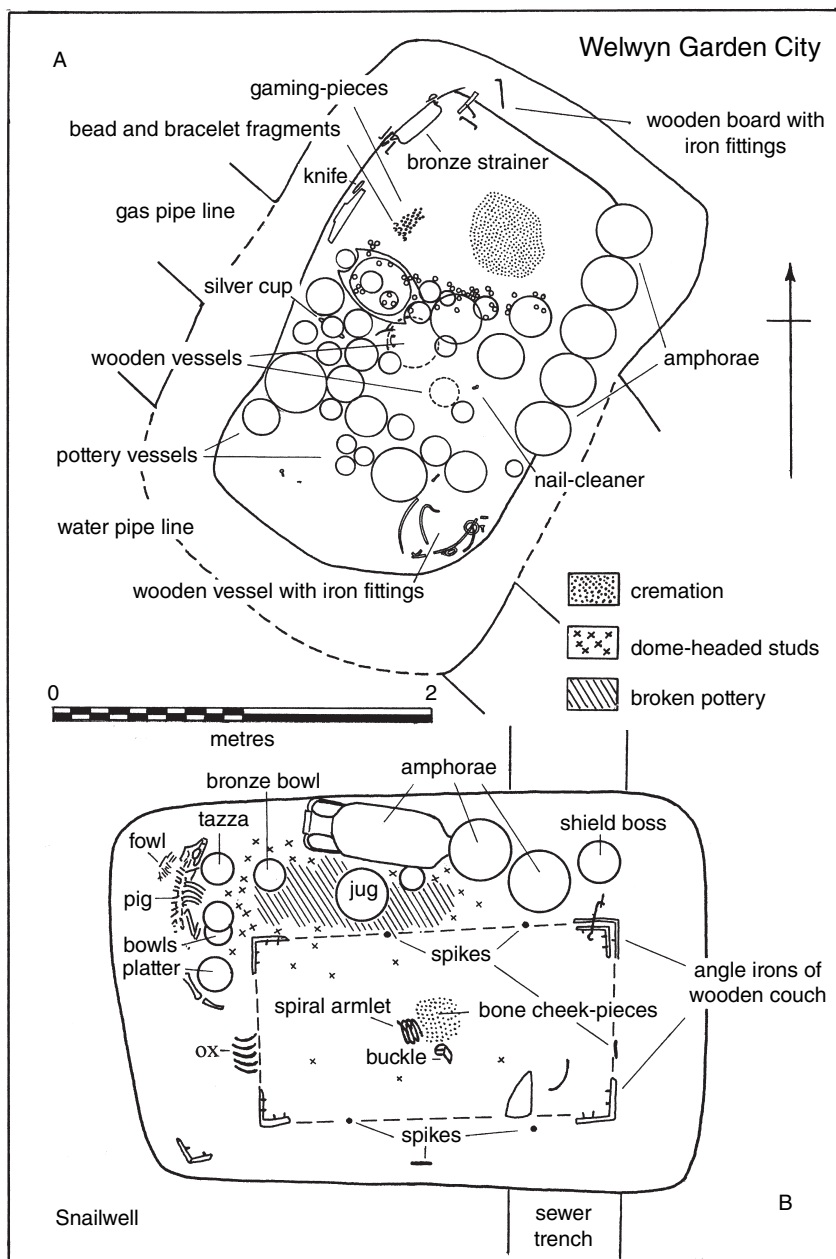


Fig. 5.8 Welwyn series burials, A, Welwyn Garden City, Hertfordshire, B, Snailwell, Cambridgeshire. Drawings adapted from Lethbridge, 1953; and Stead, 1967.

significance of this exotic piece is a matter of speculation, whether, for example, it indicates an exogamous marriage or the product of a long-distance diplomatic alliance or gift-exchange, but its immediate proximity to the cremated remains suggests uniquely a personal treasure. Distributed around the side of the grave was a selection of intact pottery vessels, *amphorae*, jugs, beakers, platters, and bowls, almost entirely imports, together with a mass of shattered pottery and fragments of bronze, echoing the ritual inclusion of debris that was a characteristic of burials or mortuary chambers from Lexden, Folly Lane, and Stanway.

The Welwyn series of burials covered the span between Caesar and the conquest, a key indicator of relative position within the sequence being a change in style of flagons of Italic origin around 15 BC (Werner, 1954), together with the progressive introduction of different types of *amphorae*. As regards their relationship to regular cemeteries, the Welwyn Garden City burial appears to have been surrounded by cremation burials in coarse ware urns, with no other associated grave-goods. Welwyn and Hertford Heath likewise appear to have been part of larger cemeteries, but the series in general has not been well served by their arbitrary discovery and recording.

One of the most striking of the signal burials of the immediately pre-conquest period is the Lexden tumulus from Colchester (Laver, 1927; Foster, 1986), which was dated by Peacock (1971: 183) on the basis of its *amphorae* around the last decade of the first century BC, a generation or so later than the regular cemetery immediately to its north-west (Hawkes and Crummy, 1995: 164–9). The artefacts themselves were extremely fragmentary; pottery vessels had been smashed and metalwork was composed of remnants, so that the excavator suspected that the tomb had been robbed in antiquity. In her re-assessment of the site, Foster (1986: 164–70) argued that this might have been possible had the tomb had a wooden chamber still intact at the time of plunder, but that it was equally possible that the assemblage had been largely broken as part of the funerary process. There was no evidence, however, that this material had been subject to burning, so that it conforms neither to the pattern of intact grave-goods nor fragmentary remnants of a funeral pyre. But, as Niblett (1999: 395) pointed out, material from the central shaft at Folly Lane appeared to have been deliberately broken, so that it is possible that the Lexden chamber was ritually destroyed as a final act before the construction of the mound. As it is, the remnants include clear indications of high rank, and an unusual number of exotic items that indicate the native aristocracy's taste for Roman luxuries. These included a silver medallion of Augustus, which affords a *terminus post quem* for the burial of 17 BC, a bronze cupid, a bronze pedestal for a small statue, and a gryphon mount from a bowl or flagon. Creighton (2006) cited the possible remains of a chair of office, with cast bronze feet, together with silver mounts in the form of grain stems, and thin strands of gold that were almost certainly from a textile garment, all

compatible with the emblems of authority of a Roman client king. In the absence of documentary authority that any British rulers were subject to Rome, Creighton's conclusion (2006: 45) that they nevertheless had acquired 'objects which emulated the symbols of Roman authority' seems unexceptionable, and was followed by Fitzpatrick (2007), who believed that both Lexden and Folly Lane were most probably the tombs of client kings. Lexden remains unique, however, and was certainly intended to make a statement of authority by the resident elite.

### BUCKET AND CAULDRON BURIALS

The inventory of bucket burials of the late pre-Roman Iron Age in Britain includes a considerable diversity in size and elaboration of the containers themselves, from the Marlborough vat, 61 cm across and 48 cm deep, which must have been for communal and ceremonial occasions, to the Great Chesterford bucket, a little over 15 cm in diameter and of similar height, and no larger than some stave-built tankards of the period. The fact that they may have been of similar construction, stave-built with metal binding, hardly warrants any assumption regarding similar function or significance.

Among the earliest discoveries of buckets containing the cremated remains are those from Aylesford in Kent, recorded by (Sir) Arthur Evans (1890). Three such burials were found, all roughly cylindrical pits no larger than was necessary to accommodate their contents. In grave X the cremated remains were in a wooden bucket with plain iron hoops and handles, together with five pottery vessels. Grave Z, in which the ashes were contained in a large, two-handled wooden tankard some 20 cm in diameter, was again accompanied by five or six pottery vessels. Grave Y was the most lavishly furnished of the three (Fig. 5.9). In addition to the bucket, at 25 cm in diameter not significantly larger than the other vessels, it contained a bronze flagon and a large *patella* in the tradition of the Italic wine service, together with three bronze brooches and four pottery vessels, which also contained cremated remains. Despite the presence of two items of wine service, it should be noted that there were no *amphorae* present in any of the graves.

The bucket from grave Y was the most elaborate, with its bronze bands ornamented in *repoussé*, and with its handle-attachments in the form of cast bronze heads with crests or headgear, presumably representing either deities, traditional heroes, or ancestor figures. It is unclear whether these containers were made expressly for the interment of the cremated remains, or whether they were re-used, having previously served another purpose in an aristocratic household. Stead (1971: 276) believed that the Aylesford bucket, a prestigious vessel that may have been for mixing wine, should be reconstructed, like the

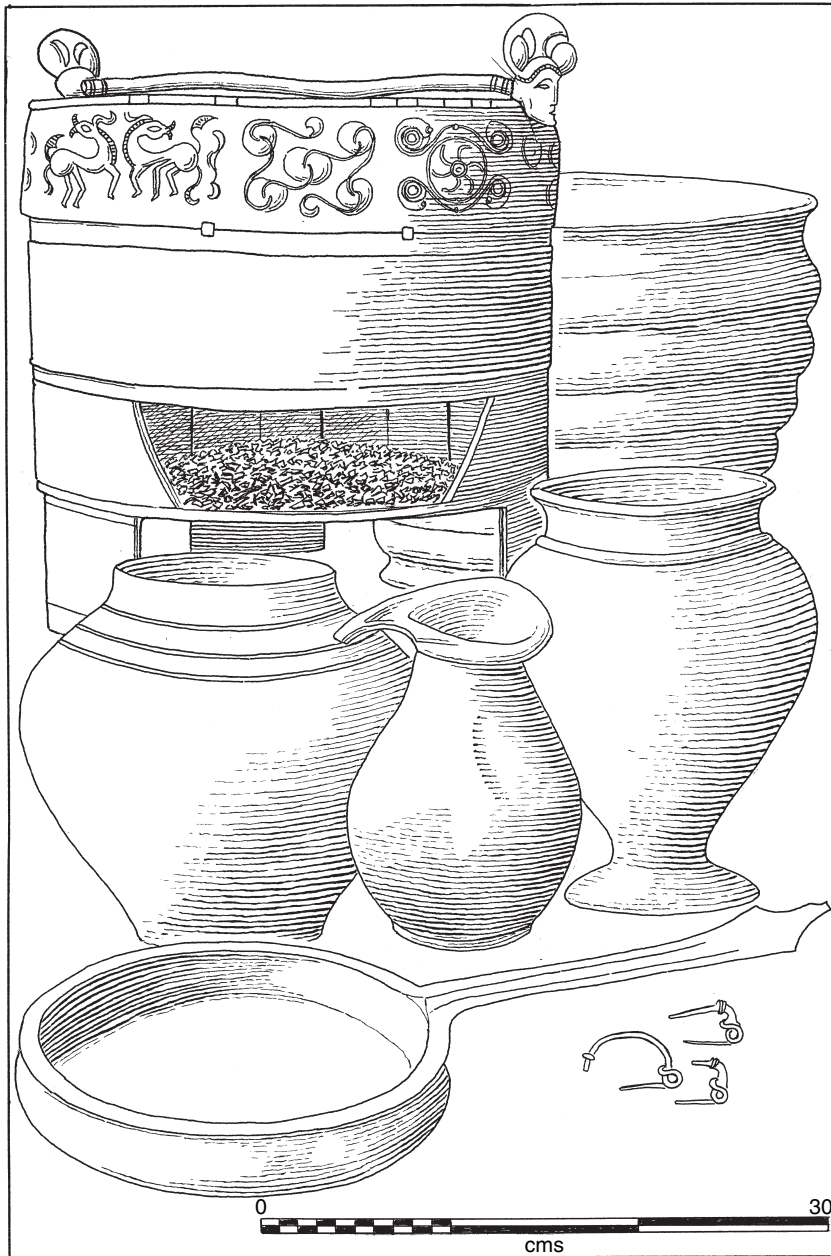


Fig. 5.9 Aylesford, Kent, grave group. Drawing adapted from Evans, 1890.



Baldock example, with staves extended to form tripod feet, 'in imitation of contemporary Roman practice' (Stead, 1971: 278). As regards its ornament, it would be more appropriate to interpret the *repoussé* panels in terms of festive occasions rather than custom-made for funerary rituals. The curvilinear motifs, and especially those with bird-like terminals around a central whirl, are redolent of symbolism, but the paired 'horses', placed centrally on either side mid-way between the cast heads, with their rear feet anatomically incorrect for animals but entirely plausible as pantomime horses (Stead, 1971: 266; Jope, 1983), suggest a carnival occasion rather than funerary solemnity. Dating of the Aylesford grave is based essentially on the presence of imported Italic bronzes, including the *patella* and jug of Kelheim type, that were in wide circulation in north Alpine Europe in Augustan times. There has been some debate over whether the bucket was a native product or foreign import, with Jope (2000: 95) reaching a compromise conclusion that it was made by a craftsman with foreign experience working in south-eastern England in the cosmopolitan ambience of the later first century BC.

The cemetery at Swarling in Kent (Bushe-Fox, 1925) also included a bucket burial, grave 13, with more modest grave-goods comprising two pedestal vases and six smaller bowls with a pair of bronze brooches. More recently bucket burials have been found in Kent at Alkham (Philp, 1991) and at Westhawk Farm, Ashford (Booth et al., 2008), the former certainly part of a larger group, the latter not demonstrably so from the circumstances of excavation, being apparently an isolated deposit in an otherwise post-conquest settlement. From the A2 near Gravesend two graves were uncovered on Site B (Allen et al., 2012) that were described by the excavators as 'high status' but which were more on a par with the bucket burial at Swarling. Grave 4312 had a pair of pedestal vases placed centrally in the circular grave-pit, with the cremated remains contained within a bronze-bound wooden bucket, 25 cm in diameter, set to one side. Its neighbour had the cremated remains placed centrally, possibly originally in a box, around which three pairs of brooches and two pairs of pedestal jars and necked foot-ring bowls had been carefully placed. Both pits were well under a metre in diameter, and, apart from the presence of a bucket in one, would hardly rank as signal burials. Had they been part of a wider cemetery, which in this case they plainly were not, they might have been regarded as focal, but, if ever intended as such, the continuing use of the site evidently never materialized.

North of the Thames, and possibly somewhat earlier than Aylesford, on account of its inclusion of an Italian Dressel 1A *amphora* as opposed to the Dressel 1B form that characterized burials of the Welwyn series, was the deposit from Baldock (The Tene burial 1: Stead and Rigby, 1986), datable to the earlier first century BC if not the later second. The Baldock assemblage (Fig. 5.10) included two wooden buckets with integral tripod bases, but neither appeared to have been used as a repository for the cremated remains. Instead,

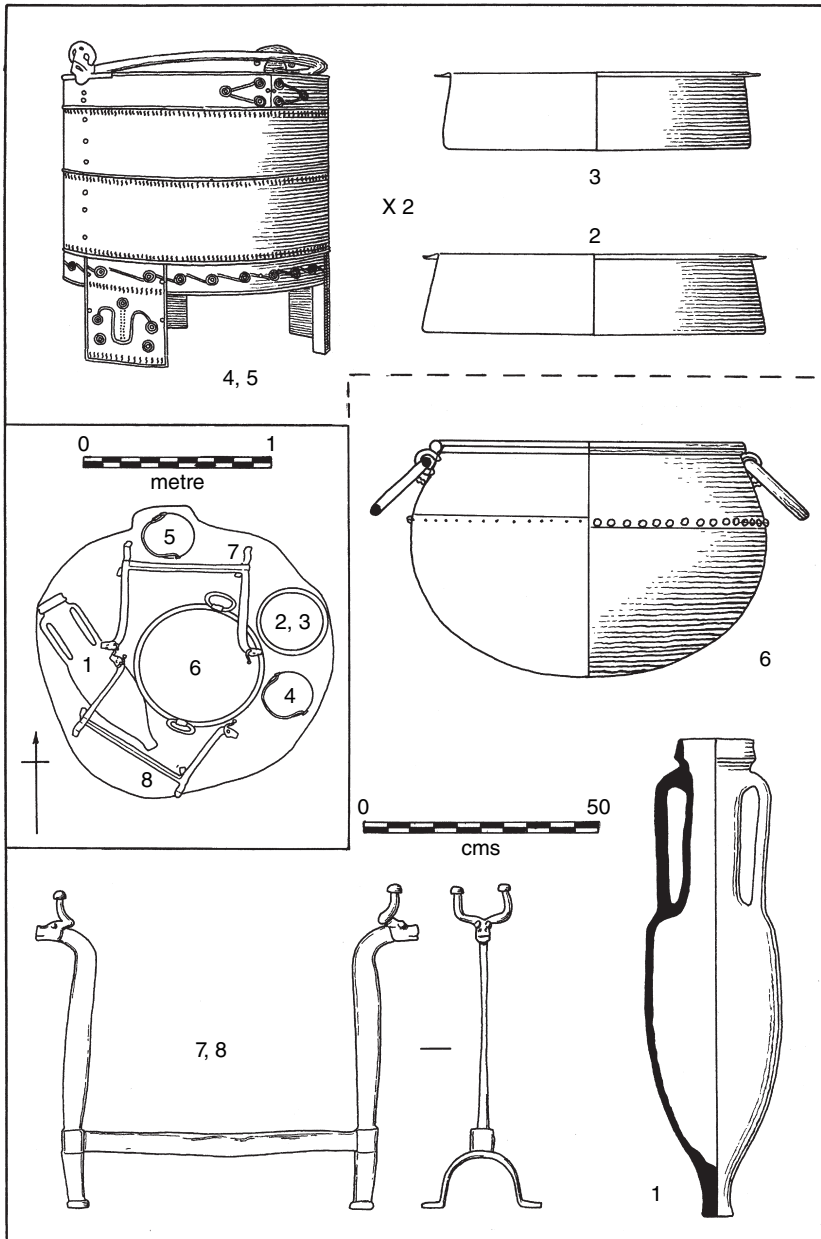


Fig. 5.10 Baldock, Hertfordshire, the Tene, grave group. Drawing adapted from Stead and Rigby, 1986.

minimal ashes, together once again with fragments of brown bear, were found in the bronze and iron cauldron that occupied prime position in the circular pit. Remains of a pig, possibly originally the entire animal, had also been included among the offerings. Other material included two bronze bowls and a pair of firedogs. Allowing for the salvage circumstances at Baldock, in this packed assemblage of prestigious symbols of hearth and home the small quantity of cremated human remains might seem 'almost incidental' (Garrow and Gosden, 2012: 247), and the contents of the pit have more the appearance of a hoard than of a grave.

Like the buckets, the cauldron was doubtless part of a communal feasting and drinking service, its reinforced rim and twin loop-handles allowing this substantial vessel to be suspended. Cauldrons are not regularly found as receptacles for cremations, but Stead cited the example from Stanfordbury, which disintegrated on excavation (Dryden, 1845), but evidence for which survives in its two ring-handles and in the tripod from the same grave from which it might have been suspended. A similar but smaller example was found in the nineteenth century at Spetisbury, Dorset (Gresham, 1939), in a context that could have been part of a war cemetery of the period of the conquest. On the Continent they are certainly known in funerary contexts of the Augustan period, notably in grave B from Goeblange-Nospelt, less than 20 kilometres north of the Titelberg in Luxembourg (Thill, 1966, 1967; Metzler et al., 2009).

One of the most spectacular of the presumed bucket burials was that found in 1807 on the outskirts of Marlborough in Wiltshire (Colt Hoare, 1812: 35, pl. VI; Cunnington, 1887). Some uncertainty surrounds its identification as a burial. Colt Hoare noted that 'it contained some human bones, which seems to prove it having been appropriated to sepulchral uses', whereas the Revd Charles Francis, who originally informed Colt Hoare of the find, made no express claim to this effect. The Marlborough bucket was substantially larger than Aylesford, with a capacity of nearly 100 litres, and like Aylesford it was bound with sheet-bronze panels ornamented in *repoussé*. Though very fragmentary, it is clear that the panels included human heads, both paired profiles and full-frontal faces, together with some exotic animal representations. Among the profiles, one with flowing locks, moustache, and lentoid eyes could be the archetypal representation of a Celt of the traditional image. The full-frontal faces had open sockets for their eyes, presumably originally holding glass settings. One with central parting was compared by Jope (2000: 98) to the female deity on the Rynkeby cauldron from Denmark, and it is possible that the Marlborough images were intended as representations of heroes or deities in an artistic milieu in which the image of man was uncommon until the latest phase of the pre-Roman Iron Age. The animals are not naturalistic, but belong to a fabulous pantheon, though most have equine aspects. It is difficult to assign the Marlborough bucket to a date closer than the first century BC, and once again stylistically it suggests various sources of influence

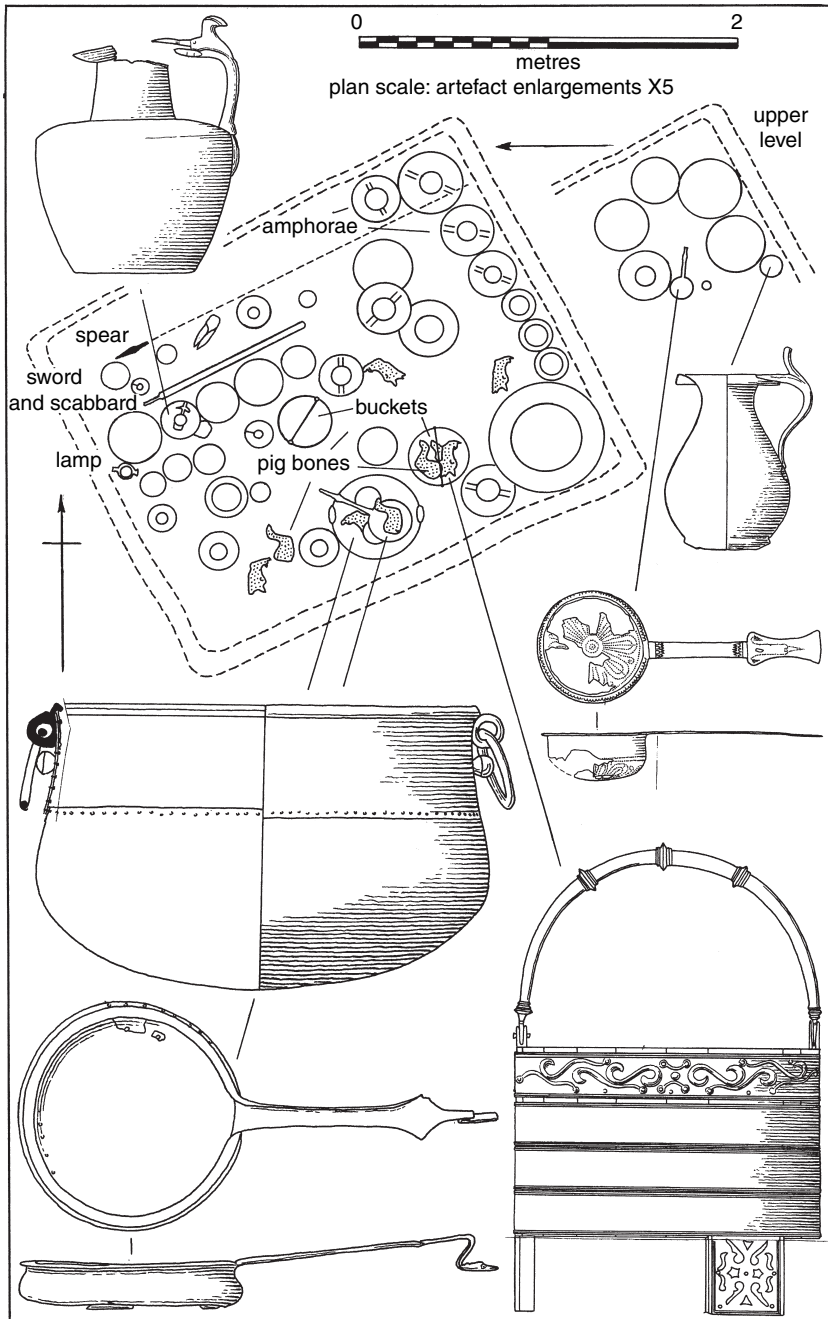


Fig. 5.11 Goebblange-Nospelt, Luxembourg, grave B plan. Drawing adapted from Metzler et al., 2009.

on an insular workshop rather than an actual import. If such an exotic item really was funerary, then it must signal something special with regard to the individual concerned or the occasion and circumstances of deposit, which makes it the more surprising that the grave did not contain other items, or indeed was not of more conspicuous construction.

An obvious parallel for the tripod-footed buckets among continental late La Tène burials is again from grave B at Goebblange-Nospelt (Fig. 5.11). The four graves were notable for their inclusion of weapons, and have been thought of as those of aristocratic cavalry auxiliaries, but in the present context the importance of the grave B assemblage is its pair of bronze-bound wooden buckets, broadly of the same size as the example from grave Y at Aylesford, and likewise with the wooden staves extending into tripod feet. The parallel with Aylesford extends to a wine flagon of Kelheim type and a long-handled *patella* but with swan's neck terminal. The wine service also included another later variant of flagon, a bronze bowl, and a bronze cauldron with ring-handles not unlike the example from Baldock. Apart from *amphorae*, the ceramic assemblage ran to some three dozen pieces, mainly platters and beakers for food and drink, predominantly of Italic or southern Gaulish origin. These especially enabled the dating of grave B to be established within a relatively close bracket between the last decade of the first century BC and the opening decade of the first century AD.

We have noted already the disparity in size and in the degree of ornamentation of buckets, which perhaps argues for a diversity of functions. Their distribution in burials certainly extends beyond the supposed zone of 'Aylesford' cremations, with Marlborough to the west and Hurstbourne Tarrant to the south-west (Hawkes and Dunning, 1930: 304–9). If the re-interpretation of the iron hoops from the Melsonby hoard near Stanwick in Yorkshire as bands from a stave-built vessel (Fitts et al., 1999: 40–6 and fig. 26) is correct, and it is certainly more consistent with the dimensions of the surviving fragments than their conventional interpretation as tyres from a wheeled vehicle, then the distribution would extend significantly to the north as well.

## POST-CONQUEST SIGNAL BURIALS

It is not always clear, in view of the proliferation of Roman imports into certain areas of south-eastern England in the last decades before the conquest, whether some of these late signal burials might not have been deposited in the immediately post-conquest period, perhaps as a gesture of native identity in the face of Roman domination. Almost certainly post-conquest was the remarkable burial 6260 on Site D of the A2 development (Fig. 5.12; Allen et al., 2012). Grave 6260, dating around AD 50–70, on the north-east side of a

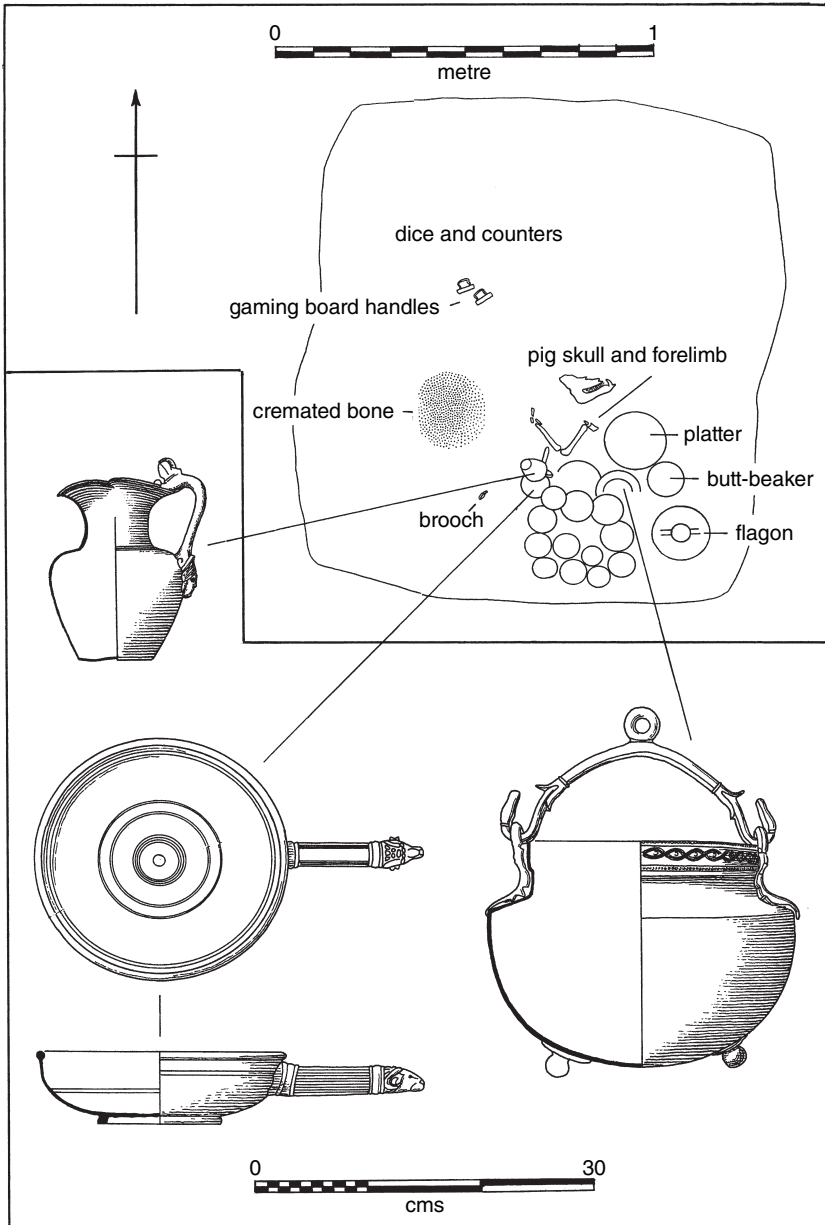


Fig. 5.12 A2 excavations south of Gravesend, Kent, plan of grave 6260. Drawing adapted from Allen et al., 2012.

complex of rectilinear enclosures, in the north-west corner of which was a small cemetery, was exceptional in its layout and wealth of accompaniments. Most of the tableware occupied the south-east corner of the 2.4 metre square chamber, with the cremation itself in the south-west quadrant and evidence of gaming-board, dice, and counters in the north-west. It is not clear why the north-east quadrant was left vacant, or indeed whether it might have been occupied by organic items that had not survived. Traces of wood and bronze fittings suggested the presence of furniture, possibly with internal divisions or levels in the chamber.

The accompanying goods included three bronze vessels associated with the drinking service, a three-footed, handled wine-mixer, a *patera*, and a ewer, all of Italian manufacture. In addition, there were eighteen pottery vessels, including handled jars, ten of which were imports. Joints of meat were represented by the skull and forelimbs of a pig, placed near the centre of the chamber between the cremated remains and the tableware. As with the Welwyn graves of the pre-Roman period the prevailing themes are eating, drinking, and gaming. A single if quite smart brooch was the only item of personal ornament. Evidently the tradition among aristocratic families in the south-east for lavish display in death continued unabated into the early Roman period, raising of course questions as to whether this might not be representative of one of those groups that had become allies of Rome before the conquest. In any event it is striking that the construction of the most elaborate tombs coincided with the period when insular independence was threatened with extinction.

## Graves and grave-goods

It has been stressed that the archaeological remains of the dead in a formal grave represent only the final stage in what may well have been a protracted and complex series of stages in funerary ritual. From this final stage, however, the archaeologist is potentially able to make an informed assessment of several aspects of the prevailing funerary practice, notably:

- the context of burial, whether individual, grouped, or collective;
- its structure, whether simple pit, with or without coffin, cist, or more elaborate tomb with the provision of additional space for accompaniments;
- the placement of the remains, whole or part, cremation or inhumation, in the latter case including factors such as orientation and posture;
- the presence or absence of grave-goods, their intrinsic character, and their choreography within the burial area;
- any adjacent features, such as remains of pyres or related structures that might reflect pre-depositional stages in funerary ritual;
- any secondary episodes of activity, such as subsequent burials or ‘grave robbing’.

There is an implicit assumption that cemeteries should be relatively compact groups of graves, with or without a defining enclosure boundary. In the case of a larger cemetery, it might even be possible from grave associations to determine that it expanded over time in one particular direction, as in the case of Wetwang Slack or in the classic instance at Münsingen. Some graves in larger cemeteries were collectively ordered in regular ranks, as at Rudston or Harlyn Bay, implying an informed rather than random pattern of expansion. Smaller burial grounds, however, perhaps used over a shorter period of time, may be dispersed, or in small clusters over a wider area, as at Adanac Park, Cockey Down, Melton, or Little Woodbury, making their recognition more difficult in the absence of widespread stripping. This pattern could arise if a family group, for example, was segregated from the next allowing for infilling over time, which may not have happened if the settlement served by the cemetery for some reason was abandoned.



In present-day western society a grave is simply a place of burial, designed for the disposal and commemoration of the dead. Cremation by contrast almost invariably dispenses with any permanent memorial, and for that reason is often favoured by communities that are highly mobile and no longer locally kin-based. Graveyards and crematoria nevertheless are clearly defined places, physically and conceptually separated from the living community. It is not clear that this distinction pertained in prehistory, or that burial monuments as commonly identified archaeologically were solely for the disposal of the dead. In the case of monumental Neolithic tombs, for example, like the passage graves of the Boyne valley, with their elaborate chambers, stone basins, and massive stone passages and peristaliths ornamented with megalithic art, or other tombs in Britain and Ireland with monumental façades or forecourts that were doubtless designed for ceremonial purposes, the presence of human remains may have been ancillary to the monument's primary purpose as a communal ceremonial centre. Chambered tombs and earthen long barrows can anyway have accommodated only a small percentage of the population, the majority of the Neolithic dead being in consequence as 'elusive' archaeologically as were their Iron Age successors.

### GRAVE CONSTRUCTION, SCALE, AND PURPOSE

The great majority of Iron Age graves in cemeteries, in Britain and in continental Europe, consist of pits no larger than is necessary to accommodate the remains of the dead, with or without grave-goods. Occasionally in pit graves there is evidence of a wooden coffin, for example, in the Rudston Makeshift cemetery, where stains indicated the former position of upright panels of what, in the absence of nails or metal brackets, must have been jointed coffins. At King Harry Lane, Verulamium, in the late pre-Roman Iron Age, there were several instances of a plank or board, which the excavator stressed was only a cover and not a coffin-lid or part of a more substantial timber grave lining. In some regional groups, such as the cist-graves of Cornwall and the Isles of Scilly, or some of the Durotrigan graves of south Dorset, the pit may be lined with stones, with or without a floor or slabs over the top, accommodating the body in the manner of a stone coffin.

In marked contrast are the continental *Fürstengräber* of the late Hallstatt or early La Tène, or the rich tombs of the late La Tène period in Britain or in continental Europe, in which the grave consists of a larger chamber, apparently laid out with furnishings of hearth and home as if intended to provide accommodation for the dead. It is not simply sufficient to explain these as aristocratic tombs, even if they were, since their layout and provision seems to imply a different expectation of the afterlife, though conceivably only for the

interim period between death and release of the spirit, in the case of inhumations presumably coinciding with decomposition of the body. Certainly the number of such signal tombs is small in proportion to the total, and interestingly there does not seem to be a significant gradation between these and the generality of graves in cemeteries. In some European Iron Age cultures, notably those of Etruscans, the tomb is designed to emulate the houses of the living, albeit on a more confined scale, and it is conceivable that this notion likewise informed the construction and layout of the north Alpine chamber burials. Even among regular cemeteries structural similarities between funerary enclosures and domestic architecture become more noticeable in the later pre-Roman period (Villes, 2000). The only real evidence for this in the British Iron Age is from the more elaborate cremation burials of the late pre-Roman Iron Age in south-eastern England, where domestic equipment and furnishings are provided in the burial chamber. Otherwise there is very little to suggest that graves or grave enclosures mirrored houses of the living, even in the way that Bronze Age barrows have sometimes been thought of as mirroring the design of domestic round-houses.

Most complex of Iron Age burials prior to the late pre-Roman period in terms of pit construction are the chariot burials of eastern Yorkshire and beyond. Though the wheels were generally dismantled, so that no provision needed to be made for recessing them in the bottom of the grave pit in the manner of continental early La Tène chariot burials, the pit is nevertheless sometimes extended at one end to take the draft pole. In some instances it is suggested that the body of the chariot was inverted over the deceased, so that it served as a protective covering or miniature chamber. Yet ironically the dismantling of the chariot, the placing of its wheels, and the inversion of its body makes it almost appear as if it were the chariot rather than the human deceased that was being symbolically buried.

In most simple pit or cist-burials, the grave appears to have been the extent of the deceased's domain. In the cemeteries of eastern Yorkshire, on the other hand, and increasingly in recent discoveries elsewhere, what is essentially a simple pit burial is enclosed by a small square, or occasionally circular, barrow ditch, introducing the idea of a second level of segregation between the personal space of the dead and the living world, represented by a restricted space defined by the ditch. This of course assumes that the purpose of the ditch was more than simply as a quarry for the material to form a modest mound, which is implicit in its regular plan. It may have defined an area within which funerary rites were performed. But we have also seen that it marked a boundary, for example, within which infants might not be interred. In a number of instances square-ditched barrows are agglomerated into clusters sharing a common ditch, not evidently enforced by lack of room in view of the open spaces between one grouping and the next. Whimster (1981) recognized that some of the larger cemeteries like Carnaby were made up of

clusters, while Parker Pearson (1999b: 57) saw the clusters at Rudston and Burton Fleming as reflecting social groupings. For Rudston Sheelagh Stead (1991) identified a number of bone anomaly links between skeletons from within archaeologically coherent clusters that suggested the possibility that these reflected family or kin groups.

In the late pre-Roman Iron Age in south-eastern England at King Harry Lane, Verulamium, ditched enclosures, again often forming several adjoining compounds, contain multiple flat graves, sometimes clustering around a 'focal' burial. By contrast, the more lavishly equipped burials of the Welwyn series were generally in larger pits to contain their fuller inventories, but the pits themselves were seemingly unlined and without vaults to cover a cavity. The Welwyn Garden City grave had a straw mat covering part of its floor (Stead 1967: 40–1), but drapes or linings are otherwise not commonly recorded. Caskets in general do not become common until after the Roman conquest, but the pre-conquest burial 9200 at Westhawk Farm, Ashford, in Kent (Booth et al., 2008) had a wooden box with copper alloy mounts that appears to have largely filled the burial pit, and which, despite extensive damage by developer's machinery, the excavators believed may have contained much of the grave-goods as well as the cremated remains.

At Stanway (Crummy et al., 2007) more formal rectilinear compounds enclosed a series of more lavishly furnished graves, but also other structures associated with the funerary ceremonies. Unlike the mortuary chambers from the same complex, the graves do not appear to have been solid-framed timber-lined pits, but the doctor's grave evidently did have some internal sub-division and certainly had a wooden cover so that the contents would have been contained in a void. The scribe's grave contained nails, which may likewise indicate a wooden cover that has not otherwise survived, and, despite the absence of any surviving traces of wood, the case for there having been a cover over the largely undisturbed assemblage in the warrior's grave is strong (ibid. 172, 427). The nature of the infilling of the mortuary chambers at Stanway also indicated to the excavators that they had been covered with a mound, probably no more than would account for the material quarried from the chambers, and the graves themselves may likewise have had some low markers.

## PLACEMENT OF THE DEAD

The majority of formal inhumations are of just one individual, very occasionally with a second adult or child, and where cremations have been adequately examined, generally the same conclusion seems warranted. In most cases a conscious attempt appears to have been made to avoid

disturbing previous burials, so that the significant quantities of bones additional to the principal inhumation in graves at Suddern Farm, apparently the result of earlier graves being disturbed, must indicate a radical departure from standard practice.

Inhumation was commonly in a flexed or crouched posture, often thought to mirror the foetal position, and hence to imply some sense of cyclic progress through life in a greater order. In a number of instances a tightly crouched posture suggests that the dead were bound or more probably tightly wrapped in a funerary shroud (Cunliffe and Poole, 2000b: 168). We should not exclude the possibility, however, that an apparently tight posture reflects re-assembly of dry bones after excarnation. This would also account for the occasional absence of certain bones, lost or removed in the process of defleshing and disarticulation or during excarnation or interim interment, though the loss of smaller bones from older discoveries may be attributable to poor standards of recovery, or in more recent salvage circumstances to damage by machinery. Re-assembling of skeletons could of course be betrayed by unintentional anatomical anomalies, or it may indicate deliberate rearrangement of remains of the kind that has been reported from the later Bronze Age settlement at Cladh Hallan in South Uist (Parker Pearson et al., 2007; Hanna et al., 2012). Such anomalies, intentional or otherwise, are plainly a phenomenon that future excavation should take care to anticipate more generally in the British Iron Age.

Orientation of the grave, or of the body within the grave, was surely significant in Iron Age funerary ritual, though its interpretation in terms of cultural cosmology may be highly speculative (Parker Pearson, 1999b). Since inhumations are commonly on their sides, an initial option lies between the orientation of the body as a whole or the direction in which the face was turned. There were clearly regional preferences in terms of orientation, though none apparently exclusive, with no apparent explanation in terms of age, gender, or status for these variations. Particularly puzzling is the wholesale shift in the Makeshift cemetery at Rudston from a majority of burials oriented north-south to an apparently later preference for an east-west orientation, a change that so far has not been reflected in any other major cemetery in the series.

Cremations may be contained within an urn or other vessel, or not. Where they are not, the remains were sometimes contained within a bag or otherwise placed in a restricted deposit. Since they were not generally just scattered into the grave pit, it would appear that the relatively small quantity recovered of cremated remains is the result of selectivity on the part of those responsible for the burial. Was it simply that a token quantity was sufficient, or were the rest of the cremated remains required for disposal elsewhere? And if the latter was the case, might the same principle also have applied to the treatment of disarticulated human bones after excarnation?

## DRESSING OF THE BODY

An initial question is whether the body in burial was clothed in everyday dress or in some form of shroud or specifically funerary attire. Since for the most part in the British Iron Age the textiles or fabrics of the dress will not have survived, we are dependent upon the few associated artefacts, notably pins and brooches, where these were used as dress-fasteners rather than simply as ornaments, to indicate the nature and fitting of clothing.

The commonest forms of dress fitting in the British and European Iron Age are the pin and the brooch. Various forms of pin had been current in the later Bronze Age and the first (Hallstatt) Iron Age, from which we may infer that the tunic and over-cloak were the basic items of clothing worn by men, and the same with longer tunics by women. By the second (La Tène) Iron Age in Europe the safety-pin brooch, with spring for tension, bow to contain the folds of cloth, and pin with catch-plate to secure it, had become universal in those areas where the La Tène material assemblage prevailed. With it had come the habit of wearing trews, possibly adopted from eastern Europe since such was not a custom south of the Alps, together with a tunic, waist-length for men, ankle-length for women, and over-cloak, as described by Diodorus (*Hist.* V. 30) and Strabo (*Geography*, IV, iv, 3), based upon Posidonius' observation. Archaeologically, the best-known illustrations of these garments are the foot soldiers and riders depicted on the early La Tène scabbard from grave 994 at Hallstatt and the prisoners represented on the metal fragment of statue from Volubilis in Mauretania, attributed to the third-century Arch of Caracalla. The latter depicts a putatively British captive from the campaigns of Septimius Severus in chequered trews and wearing a cloak affixed by a brooch at his right shoulder, in a manner that, as Hawkes contended (1982: 52), would in other circumstances have left his sword-arm free. The other prisoner, nevertheless, is shown with the brooch-fastening in the centre, and with the cloak apparently thrown back over both shoulders, so that it is possible that the cloak could simply have been adjusted by the wearer as a gesture of intent. A further variant might have pinned each side of the cloak independently, with a brooch on each shoulder.

Where the bodies are laid out as extended inhumations, as they are, for example, on or beside four-wheeled wagon burials of the Hallstatt Iron Age, or in continental La Tène chariot burials of the Hunsrück-Eifel or the Champagne, it is perfectly plausible to imagine that the dead were dressed broadly as in life. This view would be encouraged by the relative positions of accompanying dress fittings, not just brooches but women's metal belt-plates (*Gürtelbleche*) in Hallstatt D or of knives, belts, and swords in the early La Tène. But where the body is buried in a crouched position, sometimes very contracted, it seems more likely that it was buried in something akin to a large kit-bag or in swaddling, rather than in everyday clothing. At Burton Fleming and Rudston (Stead, 1991),

where the normal position of the body was crouched or contracted, many burials had a single brooch in the vicinity of the head rather than the shoulder, perhaps indicative of a shroud or bag fastened by a single brooch. The evidence from textiles was limited, but where it survived, as in Burton Fleming grave 20, it certainly pointed to a wool twill garment such as an outer cloak (Crowfoot, 1991: 119). But contracted or tightly crouched burials like Rudston 25 and Burton Fleming 6 could have been wrapped in a shroud. Pins could have secured a shroud or bag, as in Rudston 38, where ring-headed pins were found at head and foot of a contracted inhumation. The fact that brooches were much less common with Stead Type B burials, however, in which flexed or extended inhumations are dressed with other artefacts, might lend support to the view that they served a specific purpose in contracted or tightly crouched burials.

Augstein (2009) has drawn attention to some apparently anomalous but nevertheless recurrent aspects of body posture in Hallstatt burials, notably those, predominantly of adult women, in which the arms are sharply bent with hands on breast or collar bone. Since this posture is only adopted selectively, the inference drawn is that this must signify something regarding the social status of the dead, whether marital or familiar or related to standing or affiliation within the community. But we should also consider the possibility that skeletal remains that display unusual physical postures might be the product of excarnation and re-assembly. In these circumstances we may presume that dressing the skeleton in any normal sense would have been redundant, so that any dress fittings or ornaments would have had a token or proxy purpose.

## GRAVE-GOODS

‘Grave-goods’ in conventional usage embrace several different kinds of deposit that could serve different functions in relation to the dead and derive from different sources, not all of which represent possessions in life of the deceased. These may be summarized as

- grave furnishings, generally only encountered in more lavishly equipped graves, like those of the late Hallstatt *Fürsten* or late La Tène aristocratic warriors, but in Britain on a lesser scale most obviously including the vehicle and equestrian gear associated with chariot burials in eastern Yorkshire and beyond and some of the late La Tène graves of the Welwyn series,
- ‘personal’ ornaments and dress-fastenings, most obviously bracelets and brooches that were worn by the deceased, or were attached to the garments they were wearing or the shroud in which the body was wrapped,

- indicators of rank or role in society, of which the Mill Hill, Deal, 'crown' might be an extreme example (Parfitt, 1995), but which might also include examples of parade weaponry, like the sword with elaborately decorated scabbard from grave K3 at Kirkburn (Stead, 1991), which could have been used in combat by the young adult with whom it was buried, or it could have been a symbol of office like a sword of state, too precious to be hazarded in battle but sacrificed in honour of the dead,
- funerary accessories, notably the dining or drinking services included in well-equipped graves of the late pre-Roman Iron Age Welwyn series, where the service may replicate what was used in life by the deceased but equally might have been a requirement for the funerary ritual, irrespective of his or her former lifestyle,
- residues from some other episode in the funerary process, perhaps joints of meat or containers of other food and drink from the funeral feast, or the broken and charred remnants from the funeral pyre in the case of cremation burials,
- tokens of esteem deposited by kin, clients, and others who were dependent upon, or had allegiance to or alliance with the deceased, which might account for occasional exotic items included in the grave inventory,
- offerings to gods or supernatural forces on behalf of the deceased by kin or wider community for various reasons dependent upon beliefs and perceptions of an afterlife or 'otherworld'.

Determining to which category an item belongs at times may be subjective, not least since some categories were probably not mutually exclusive. The last category in particular could make nonsense of inferences drawn from grave-goods regarding the status and role of the deceased in life, since they may reflect the community's awe for their gods, or the degree to which they believed it necessary to placate them on behalf of the deceased, rather than their regard for that individual. Some basic distinctions nevertheless can be made between grave furnishings, personal ornaments, and other accessories, for instance, though the evaluation of accessories may be more contentious.

### **Tomb furnishing and equipment**

The great majority of Iron Age burials, in Britain and in continental Europe, comprise simply the remains of the deceased in a grave that is no larger than was required to contain them, with minimal grave-goods. Only in the very small minority of tombs is the chamber significantly larger, sufficient to require or allow for tomb furniture and grave-goods on a grander scale. This raises a question whether the purpose of the tomb was more than simply the

respectful disposal of the dead, or whether an opportunity was being taken to make a statement on behalf of the community or at least its ruling elite.

In the case of the largest and most lavishly equipped of the signal burials of the European Iron Age, dating from late Hallstatt to late La Tène, it is clear that the burial chamber was fitted out with furnishings, including wall-drapes at Hochdorf, for example, and in the case of grave VI at the Hohmichele using silk among the soft furnishings. The princess's burial at Vix also yielded evidence of fabrics, with grave accompaniments that were clearly arranged in deliberate order. The Hochdorf burial is unusual in its size, at 11 metres square, and therefore provides an ideal opportunity to study the choreography of its layout. It is also unique north of the Alps in having a bronze couch on which the dead was laid to rest with his personal effects, arranged on the opposite side of the chamber from the four-wheeled wagon that carried an assortment of equestrian gear and a bronze dining service. The three bronze basins and nine bronze plates, together with the nine drinking horns hung on the south wall of the chamber, one of iron and much larger than the others, suggest banqueting sets for a specified group of individuals. Whilst still relatively modest in comparison with Etruscan tombs, the furnishing of late Hallstatt and early La Tène graves in north Alpine Europe may well reflect Mediterranean ideas and customs, though the idea that selective imports of Greek or Etruscan vessels might indicate the adoption of the Greek *symposion* has rightly been questioned. These lavishly furnished graves are nevertheless focused on the twin themes of feasting and drinking in the comfort and security of hearth and home, themes that notably recur in late La Tène burials in continental Europe and in some late pre-Roman Iron Age graves in south-eastern England. Apart from ceremonial, ritual, or sporting items, weaponry and armour is not a prominent component of the funerary suite. The latter are certainly widely represented in both Hallstatt and La Tène cemeteries across north Alpine Europe, but often not in that category of tomb that has conventionally been attributed to the ruling elite of a stratified hierarchy.

An equally limited number of high-status late La Tène tombs likewise have substantial chambers within which the remains of the dead and associated furnishings and grave-goods were choreographed in what evidently would have been a meaningful arrangement. At Clemency (Fig. 5.7; Metzler et al., 1991), as we have seen, feasting and drinking were implicit in the presence of *amphorae* and a suite of pottery and bronze vessels, remains of pigs, and an iron griddle, while the same themes are reflected in the series of lavishly equipped graves from Goebblange-Nospelt (Metzler et al., 2009), where additionally the presence of weapons in three of the graves has led to the suggestion that these may have been of aristocratic Treveran cavalry auxiliaries.

In Britain there are no known graves of the complexity or lavishness of these continental examples before the immediately pre-conquest period, and, as we have noted, even the chariot burials, apart from the vehicle fittings and



harness attachments, and the warrior panoply that complemented the chariot, are not noted for the wealth or diversity of other grave-goods. Offerings of meat certainly appear to have been included, but not with the trappings of extravagant feasting and drinking, which need not mean, of course, that extravagant feasting and drinking did not take place as part of the funerary ceremonies.

In the late pre-Roman Iron Age, the recurrence of *amphorae*, wine service or tableware, and other accoutrements of hearth and home in the Welwyn series certainly lends support to the belief that there was a recognized inventory of items appropriate to or required for burial. Perhaps the most iconic of the grave furnishings, redolent of the comforts and hospitality of the hearth, are the firedogs that are found with several of the Welwyn type graves, notably Welwyn A, Stanfordbury A, Mount Bures, and Baldock. These and others from non-funerary contexts, with their symbolic bulls' head protomes, must surely have had a talismanic quality, and together with drinking and dining services epitomize archaeologically the qualities of companionship that the classical authors stressed. But they may not tell us so much about the deceased. As Piggott remarked (1971: 255), these graves exclude the personal in favour of the convivial.

Ironically perhaps, some of the most lavishly furnished burials of this late horizon date from around or just after the conquest, like the series from Stanway, of which the warrior's grave and the doctor's grave exemplify the principles of grave construction and choreography. They were not internally draped, though textiles were present in the warrior's grave, possibly a cloak with which some of the items were covered or wrapped. There was certainly an element of spatial organization about the layout of the contents, which was emphasized in the doctor's grave (Fig. 5.6) by the fact that the floor on its western side was 20 cm deeper, from a line where an oak panel supported the cover. Essentially the dinner service is grouped together, and the *amphora* stands in one corner, while the gaming set forms another focus. The cremated remains of the warrior are laid by his shield and spear, while the doctor's are placed on the gaming-board surrounded by his surgical instruments, perhaps indicating in both cases their roles in life. In neither case were the cremated remains contained in an urn, though they were in other burials in the series, and the subtlety of this distinction remains obscure. The large amber glass bowl in the warrior's grave, on the other hand, already old at the time of burial and curated carefully in its box, was more probably an item that had served in the funerary ceremony, and was presumably included as a symbolic gift together with the other requirements of the occasion. Many of the grander items of course were Roman products. What is less clear is the extent to which, if any, the funerary ceremonials made concessions to Roman convention, and to what extent they continued native practices which had been established long before the material trappings of Romanization had become available. The *amphorae* of the Welwyn series of graves presumably contained wine, or had

contained wine for the occasion, though it has been argued that the Snailwell *amphorae* contained fish products or olive oil (Fitzpatrick, 2007). But where *amphorae* are absent from graves it is possible that traditional local brews were still drunk out of novel tableware. As with the selective import of Greek and Etruscan items in late Hallstatt tombs, it is possible to adopt novel items of tableware or drinking service without a wholesale change of diet or drinking habits. The broader the *range* of items represented, the more probable it is that new tastes and new habits had been adopted.

### Personal grave-goods

Personal grave-goods comprise dress fittings, such as brooches or pins, or belts that were worn around the waist, or ornaments such as bracelets, neck-rings, or pendants. They may additionally include items of equipment, such as weaponry and armour, or occasionally exotic items that may signify higher social status, or a special role in society like that of a doctor or priest. In the later pre-Roman Iron Age, toilet instruments and sets are sometimes included among grave-goods, suggesting an increased concern with personal appearance.

#### *Dress fittings and personal ornaments.*

Dress fittings, though basically functional, may be elaborated or embellished with motifs or finials that could have had special significance, though none has so far been identified convincingly as having a specifically funerary role. Embellishments like the bird finials of *Vogelkopffibeln* of the continental early La Tène, for example, doubtless incorporated an arcane symbolism that permeated every aspect of daily life, not expressly associated with the rites of death. The ornithomorphic theme survives in Britain in dragonesque brooches of the first and second centuries AD, where crested birds' heads form terminals to the serpentine body of the brooch. In fact, dragonesque brooches, the distribution of which is concentrated on the fringes or beyond the initial zone of Roman colonization, and the design of which emphasizes La Tène artistic traditions, may have been adopted as a deliberate expression of non-Roman, native identity. But again they were not designed for specifically funerary use.

In the cemeteries of eastern Yorkshire the classic early La Tène brooch is succeeded chronologically by a flat-bowed variety in which the coil-spring is commonly replaced by a hinged *faux*-spring, and thence the particularly obtuse *involute* variety. The distribution of involute brooches, now heavily weighted towards eastern Yorkshire as a result of finds from Wetwang Slack (Hull and Hawkes, 1987) and Rudston (Stead, 1991), nevertheless includes outliers in central and south-western England, including an example from a

cist-grave at Trevone in north Cornwall (Dudley and Jope, 1965). They are not found exclusively in funerary contexts, though it would be tempting to regard them as a type designed particularly for funerary purposes. The decorated examples from Beckley and Woodeaton in Oxfordshire may have been from sites of shrines, but three from Croft Ambrey, Herefordshire (Stanford, 1974) have no apparent funerary or ritual associations whatsoever. Haselgrove noted that a high proportion of middle La Tène brooches came from Arras culture burials, without which their incidence was broadly commensurate with the modest earlier Iron Age inventory, from which he remarked 'how poorly the archaeological record reflects the numbers actually in circulation, particularly if we consider how many middle Iron Age settlements have been excavated' (Haselgrove, 1997: 55). Alternatively it might be that the settlement record is a truer reflection of the relative paucity of metal brooches in everyday use in Britain, underlining the possibility that exotic varieties like the involuted series were designed particularly for funerary use.

The late pre-Roman Iron Age in southern Britain sees a significant increase in the number of brooches, not just as grave-goods but also on settlement sites like Gussage All Saints (Wainwright, 1979). In fact, it is the relative paucity of brooches in the early and middle La Tène periods that sets Britain (and Ireland) apart from continental Europe, where brooches are one of the most prolific types, occurring in hoards in thousands, as well as in cemetery and settlement contexts. It is not simply an increase in numbers, however, that characterizes the late pre-Roman Iron Age, but an increase in the number of variant types. This diversity or pluralism of brooch types was seen by Jundi and Hill (1998) as a deliberate attempt at personal display and visibility, perhaps linked to other changes in dress and personal appearance. Within funerary contexts, based upon evidence from middle La Tène cemeteries in central Europe, we might have expected the diversity of brooches to have signalled aspects of status of the dead, such as gender, age, ethnicity, or group identity.

In view of this it is perhaps surprising that brooches do not figure more prominently in the richer funerary assemblages of the late pre-Roman Iron Age in south-eastern Britain. From the King Harry Lane cemetery brooches were by far the most numerous items included in the Iron Age and early Roman graves, apart from pottery. Yet in the richer graves of the Welwyn series, for example, they hardly register. This is just one indicator that perhaps these burials are not simply at a different social level within the same funerary convention, but served a more complex role altogether. And when brooches do feature in these signal tombs, as in the 'brooches burial' CF72 at Stanway, they plainly stand for something special, since there were three pairs, all Gaulish imports, in a grave that otherwise contained only three pottery vessels, and none of the lavish dining service or gaming sets enjoyed by the warrior and the doctor. Yet it contained an expensive glass cosmetic jar that may have been an heirloom when buried.

Pins are comparatively rare in Iron Age burials, making the occurrence of elaborate copper alloy pins at Danes Graves, Sawdon, and Garton Slack more notable. Equally exotic is the Irish type pin from the cremation burial 1 at High Knowes, Alnham, Northumberland (Jobey and Tait, 1966), where it was found at one extreme end of the apparently *in situ* funerary pyre, where, assuming it was integral to the cremation, it could have pinned a shroud or cloak wrapping the dead. Its presence might suggest an incomer, or a long-distance liaison or diplomatic connection.

The other principal form of personal grave-goods is ornaments such as bracelets, armlets, or leg-rings, where the number, location, or combination may well have signified something regarding the status of the individual, not necessarily in terms of relative position in a social hierarchy so much as marital status or status within the kin group. Bracelets are more common in the cemeteries of eastern Yorkshire than they are in the rest of Britain, but there is no reason to suppose that they were primarily funerary types. They include plain and knobbed or ribbed variants, with details of technical construction and design that link them to types known from Burgundy to Bohemia rather than to the middle Rhine or the Champagne regions (Stead, 1979: 75–7). They are hardly sufficiently numerous or well recorded, however, to determine any regular patterning in their disposition on the body, as can be remarked in the middle La Tène cemeteries of central Europe (Waldhauser, 1987).

Beads were manufactured in considerable numbers in Iron Age Europe, and were commonly included in graves, where they have generally been regarded as indicative of female burials (Spindler, 1983: 269–83). In the well-known case of the late Hallstatt grave VI at the Hohmichele (Riek, 1962) this hardly seems an unreasonable inference from the associations of the two individuals buried side by side in the wagon grave. The presumed male burial had a bow by his left side and quiver with arrows by his head, though he also had a neck-ring and belt-plate, types that have sometimes implied a female burial. The other had strings of glass and amber beads draped across neck and chest. A heavy iron knife lay between them, which would have been at his right hand. Both had serpentiform brooches, presumably as dress-fastenings. The numbers of beads—some 2,360 in glass and 351 of amber—make the occasional finds from British Iron Age graves pale into insignificance. It may seem hardly credible that anyone would string a solitary bead, but Guido argued that remnants of necklaces, especially beads with potent ancestral associations, might well have been treasured as amulets. There are occasional burials in Britain where we may infer the inclusion of whole necklaces, most obviously the so-called Queen's Barrow from Arras in eastern Yorkshire, where around a hundred beads, including 46 of Guido's (1978a) Class 1, dating to the fourth or third centuries BC, were found in the nineteenth-century excavations. A less dramatic example is the cist-burial from Clevedon in Somerset, where 18 glass beads were most probably from a modest necklace.

*Weaponry and armour*

We have already considered weapon or warrior burials in the previous chapter, so it will be evident that, whilst not all graves with items of weaponry conform to pattern, there is a regular association of sword, spear, and shield, in Britain as in continental Europe that suggests that the individuals in question had the status of warriors in life, whether actively or ceremonially. More elaborate items of weaponry and armour, whether from graves like the Wetwang Slack and Kirkburn sword scabbards or from river deposits like the Witham and Battersea shields, may have been intended for use on ceremonial occasions rather than in actual combat, for which less ornamental and more robust equipment would have been more suitable. In the later Bronze Age it appears that highly decorated full-grip swords showed less evidence for use in combat than their flange-hilted counterparts (Kristiansen, 1999: 177). Whilst it is plainly true that all forms of warfare are ritualized to some degree, and that ceremonial events involving martial parades and demonstrations of prowess would doubtless have been used to reinforce the authority of the established order in a ranked society, as Kristiansen (*ibid.* 188 n. 3) observed, ‘there can be no rituals or symbols without the reality of what they signify’, so that we may reasonably infer that some, perhaps the majority, of the individuals buried with the warrior panoply had indeed been capable of fulfilling that role. Nevertheless, weapons and armour might also be symbols of rank or office, and as such might be buried with individuals of either sex for whom their actual use in combat was not implicit, any more than it would be for an honorary royal colonel of a regiment today.

An intriguing sub-group includes those burials in which weapons are accompanied by other specialist implements, like grave 154 at Rudston, where a blacksmith’s tongs and hammer are combined with two spearheads, or at Whitcombe, where sword and shield are combined with hammer and file. For the eastern Yorkshire middle Iron Age a case has been made that the power and prestige witnessed in the chariot burials was based upon the control of iron production, notably in the Foulness valley, and the maintenance of resources and external contacts via the Humber estuary (Halkon, 2011). There is no doubt that the smith in many societies is held in particular awe on account of his ability to change the physical character of natural materials, and it may be that in Iron Age communities smiths were regarded with the same respect as doctors or priests, not least because lives might depend upon their competence in making reliable weapons.

Within the overall category of spears a distinction needs to be drawn between throwing spears and heavy lances, one that was made by classical sources and which is reflected archaeologically in distinctive types, like those found in Celtiberian cemeteries. In the British material the difference may be witnessed only in the varying lengths of the blade, which in the case of the Yorkshire graves included many that were less than 10 cm in length and which

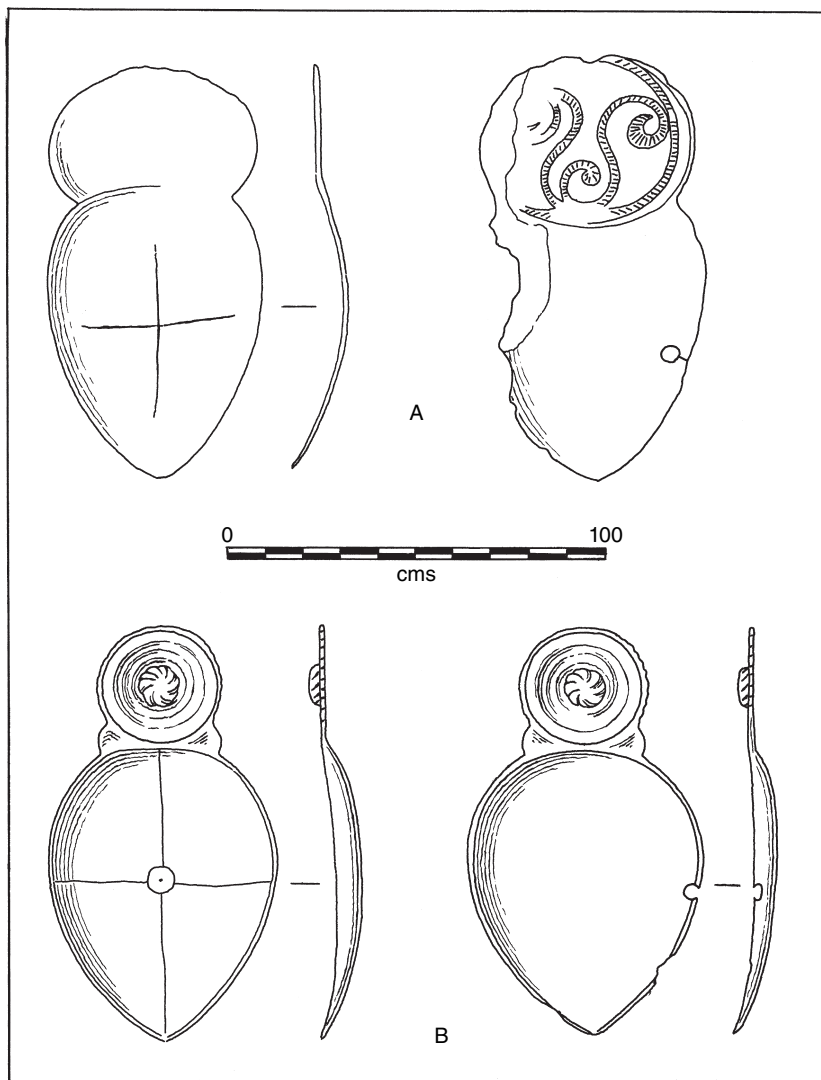
can only have served for light javelins, with occasional examples around 20 cm that could have served as lances. In fact, Stead (1991: 75) made the point that none of the Yorkshire spears had midribs for strengthening, raising the possibility that they were made especially for funerary use. Occasionally a grave has simply a spear, but there is no clear evidence for the shield and lance combination alone that has been regarded as the basic weaponry of infantry in the later Bronze Age and Iron Age from Greece to northern Europe (Kristiansen, 1999). It seems probable that burials with swords in any event represent an elite within the warrior class, since archaeological evidence points to the fact that the spear, whether of the throwing variety or the lance for close-quarter combat, remained the dominant weapon into the Roman Iron Age in north Alpine Europe (Randsborg, 1999). We should also note the presence of bone points, plainly used as weapons, at Garton/Wetwang Station, Rudston, and Grimthorpe (Stead, 1991: 78–9) and both bone and antler points in the Hjortspring, Denmark, find (Kaul, 2003: 145), indicating that there was a more mundane level of equipment which was doubtless what had to serve for the majority of Iron Age fighting troops.

The mail tunic from Kirkburn interestingly came from the chariot burial K5 rather than from the warrior grave K3, and is one of the earliest among limited examples from Iron Age Europe. The only other examples from demonstrable burial contexts from Britain are from the late pre-Roman graves at Lexden and Baldock, where the material associations did not include weaponry, so that the function of mail could simply have been for the protection and prestigious display of high-status individuals.

### *Prestige goods denoting status or role*

As a measure of status, some form of elaborate head-dress or crown is almost universal. Such items had been suspected for the British (and Irish) Iron Age, but it was not until the discovery of the Mill Hill, Deal, burial (Parfitt, 1995) that an unequivocal example of a skeleton wearing a crown came to light. This discovery prompted Stead (1995) to review the evidence for crowns and diadems of Iron Age and Romano-British date, among which two nineteenth-century finds, from Leckhampton and Dover, were reportedly found with burials; both are now lost and their dating therefore remains uncertain. The only other possible parallel for Mill Hill, and one that would be broadly contemporary, is the burial at Newnham Croft, Cambridgeshire, where the bronze casting with suspension chain could conceivably be from a variant form of headgear. Apart from sword and scabbard and shield-fittings, there were no other items in grave 112 at Mill Hill, however, that might be regarded as regal.

One category of grave-goods that has often given rise to speculation is cast and hammered bronze spoons, the purpose of which is plainly not simply domestic, since their bowls are very shallow and their handles impracticably



**Fig. 6.1** Bronze ritual spoons, A, Burnmouth, Berwickshire, B, Mill Hill, Deal, Kent. Drawing adapted from MacGregor, 1976; and Parfitt, 1995.

broad and stubby, and which in consequence have generally been regarded as accessories to ceremonial or religious rites. Around half of known examples occur as pairs, in which one almost invariably bears an incised cross on the inner bowl, while the other has a small perforation close to the edge of the bowl. The Burnmouth, Berwickshire, examples (Fig. 6.1A) were from a cist-burial containing a slightly flexed male inhumation, accompanied by an iron

knife and joint of pork. The ornament is relatively simple (MacGregor, 1976: nos 281, 282), but bears an obvious resemblance to some mirror designs. The burial has been more recently radiocarbon dated to 210–0 cal. BC (Sheridan, 2004: 175). The Mill Hill, Deal, spoons (Fig. 6.1B; Woodruff, 1904; Parfitt, 1995) were placed on either side of the skull in an inhumation that was on the fringe of the south-west cemetery, burials from which date to the second and first centuries BC. Other examples may be earlier in date, but most from Britain and Ireland lack reliable contexts or associations. The one example from France, reported by Déchelette (1914: 1276–7 and fig. 552) from Pogny in the Marne, was from a female grave of earlier La Tène date, but otherwise the limited distribution is entirely insular.

Considering some of the magnificent artefacts that Iron Age craftsmen were capable of producing, and the complex network of resource acquisition and redistribution that they evince, it is worth considering what categories of artefact do *not* normally get deposited in graves in the British Iron Age. The most obvious of these is torcs, of which the great majority date from the later pre-Roman Iron Age and are found in hoards that are not normally associated with funerary activity. Given the lavish nature of grave associations of the late pre-Roman Iron Age in south-eastern England, the absence of torcs is quite striking. In fact, the absence of rich personal ornaments in general is quite striking. In the Yorkshire cemeteries the only recorded items of gold were a ring, now lost, from the Queen's Barrow at Arras and a pin from chariot burial 2 at Wetwang Slack. A second obvious absentee on any significant scale from the later group of pre-Roman Iron Age graves is coinage, already in circulation in Britain from the end of the second century BC. These absentees of course include notably items of intrinsic value, and the obvious inference is that they were omitted because of the risk of grave robbing, which again raises the question whether separate hoards were deposited in commemoration of the dead.

### *Toilet instruments*

Toilet sets are commonly regarded as an affectation of the late pre-Roman Iron Age in Britain and a reflection of a greater interest in personal grooming and the projection of personal identity in part induced by the process of Romanization (Hill, 1997). Tweezers, ear-scoops, nail-cleaners, and suchlike implements become common on Romano-British sites, but in cemeteries of the pre-conquest period they are still relatively uncommon. Probably the earliest of the late La Tène examples was from the 1909 discovery of grave 12 at Mill Hill, Deal (Bushe-Fox, 1925; Birchall, 1965: fig. 12; Stead, 1995: 109 and fig. 48), found in a cremation burial with several pots and a La Tène 3 brooch with openwork foot. It comprised a set of bronze tweezers, nail-cleaners, and ear-scoop on a ring. The metalwork cluster from cremation 2 at Hinxton Rings also contained both tweezers and nail-cleaners (Hill et al., 1999), and there were



loose sets from three graves at King Harry Lane and single items from two others (Stead and Rigby, 1989: 104). These included both copper alloy and iron items, notably a suspected cosmetic set in copper alloy of around the conquest period from grave 203. Grave 242, assigned to the earlier first century AD, included not only iron tweezers and a dual-purpose, two-ended nail-cleaner and spatula but also a small pair of iron shears, just 10 cm in overall length, which, on account of their size and associations, must surely have been for personal grooming rather than agricultural or general use. Pairs of toilet implements were included in two cremation burials from Biddenham Loop (Luke, 2008: fig. 9.11, fig. 9.14), while outside the south-eastern cremation cemetery zone a set comprising tweezers and ear-scoop was found at the waist of a female grave of early post-conquest date at Portesham, Dorset (Fitzpatrick, 1996).

Earlier examples of toilet implements from the British Iron Age are likewise scarce, with the only unequivocal examples from funerary contexts being from the La Tène cemeteries of eastern Yorkshire. From the Queen's Barrow at Arras came the probable remnants of tweezers and a nail-cleaner on a ring, while the Wetwang Slack cemetery yielded three pairs of tweezers, two of iron and one of copper alloy (Stead, 1979: 84, fig. 34, 4 and 5). There are likewise continental examples of toilet sets or implements from the earlier La Tène cemeteries of the Champagne-Ardenne, with linked sets notably from Bussy-le-Château and Aussonce, but also including nail-cleaners, razors, and shears (Bretz-Mahler, 1971: pl. 132; Rozoy, 1987). There are several instances of associations of shears, even the larger variants, with razors from late La Tène 1 and La Tène 2 cemeteries in Champagne (Stead et al., 2006: 86–7). Haffner (1976: 29) cited several graves in the Hunsrück-Eifel that likewise included items of toilet equipment, particularly tweezers, nail-cleaners, and ear-scoops, but again in insufficient numbers to warrant generalizations regarding their significance.

There are plainly too few examples of toilet sets in graves from Britain to regard this as a key to status, gender, or role in society, or to infer any major shift in attitudes in the later pre-Roman Iron Age towards personal appearance as an expression of identity. Perhaps not surprisingly, because of factors of deposition, loss, and survival, toilet implements such as razors are not commonly found on settlement sites or in other non-funerary deposits, though occasional finds are known. From the evidence of bog bodies and from documentary accounts, however, we can reasonably infer that Iron Age men and women were concerned with their personal appearance, particularly on special occasions such as festivals or in set-piece conflicts, and that they would have had access to implements designed for grooming and cosmetic purposes. There is a general assumption that the presence of toilet sets in graves indicates social affluence, if only because it implies time and means to indulge such concerns, but there is no unequivocal archaeological or documentary evidence to indicate any gender bias.

## FOOD AND DRINK

The inclusion of joints or portions of meat is not uncommon in some regional groups of Iron Age burials. In the Rudston and Burton Fleming cemetery between a fifth and a quarter of the excavated graves contained some evidence of the inclusion of an offering of meat, with a significant distinction between the preferences of those graves that were oriented north-south and the sizeable minority that faced east-west. Of the north-south graves, 24 per cent contained sheep, with just 3 per cent favouring pig, whereas 19 per cent of the east-west graves contained pig, with none having sheep (Stead, 1991: table 47). The choice of cut of pig, furthermore, showed a particular preference for half skulls or mandibles and forelimbs; the cuts of sheep showed a preference for *humeri*, and front or hind limbs of young sheep or goats. Where offerings of meat were included in the graves from Garton Station, including the chariot burial GS6, and from Kirkburn, including the cart burial K5 and the sword burial K3, they were exclusively of pig, showing the same preferences. Legge's analysis (1991: 143-4), however, suggested that the animals had been disarticulated and the meat removed before deposition, so that the offering was symbolic rather than substantive. Selective placement of the bones in relation to the human skeletons was particularly noted in graves 3 and 5 at Kirkburn and grave 6 at Garton Station. Elsewhere, hardly surprisingly, the size of sample or level of preservation has not permitted similar observations, but it would be reasonable to conclude that these patterns reflect widely observed conventions.

Parker Pearson (1999b: 57) noted that burials with pig bones in the Rudston-Burton Fleming cemetery were 'in clusters separated from those with sheep bones', and that at least one cluster containing pig (R154-R173) was distinguished by 'small conjoining semi-detached grave ditches'. The adjacent cluster (R177-R188), however, contained equal occurrences of pig and sheep in separate graves. From artefactual associations it might be argued that graves with pig were of higher status than those with sheep, but pig occurs in square-ditched barrow graves, a circular-ditched barrow grave, and in unditched graves, so that there is no obvious correlation with grave type, other than on the basis of orientation, and any attempt to define an 'elite' on this basis seems tenuous.

A rather different pattern is revealed by the late pre-Roman Iron Age graves from the Durotrigan series of south Dorset. At Whitcombe, on the basis of those graves in which the skeletal remains could be reliably attributed to sex, it was the female burials that had offerings of pork, while male burials had sheep/goat. Perhaps significantly, however, the warrior burial contained neither, though it was otherwise quite generously furnished. At Maiden Castle the pattern was more complex. Both male and female burials had joints of lamb, only male burials had cattle, and just one female burial

had half a pig's head, a pattern which apparently is endorsed by a wider study of Durotrigan burials (Chambers, 1978). But the overall numbers were small in proportion to the total number of burials, and the 'Iron Age B' cemetery contained no offerings of meat at all, so that this hardly qualifies as a 'traditional perquisite' of the dead, being apparently a lately acquired tradition. This pattern seems to be endorsed by the mirror burial from Portesham (Fitzpatrick, 1996), which was accompanied by offerings of pig and sheep. Manor Farm, Portesham, grave 502 (Valentin, 2003), is plainly exceptional, not just in having bones of sheep, cattle, pig, horse, and dog, but by the fact that these were arranged in an arc around the young female's head.

The evidence for food accompaniments in late La Tène cemeteries in south-eastern England is more equivocal. Between a fifth and a quarter of the cremations in the King Harry Lane cemetery produced animal bones, principally pig with some bird, but these remains presumably originated on the funeral pyre, rather than being deposited as food offerings in the grave. There evidently were uncremated animal bones from the King Harry Lane graves that unfortunately were subsequently lost (Stead and Rigby, 1989: 250 n. 1). The cremated remains should therefore be distinguished from offerings of meat, like those from Snailwell, which are otherwise comparatively rare in Welwyn-type graves. Also exceptional in Britain is the complete or near-complete pig in the Tène deposit at Baldock, but a whole hog included in a signal burial would hardly be unique in continental Europe, if the remains from Clemency are indicative. The late La Tène evidence nevertheless highlights the problem of interpreting these remains, which could result from different practices. Some may indeed be the residues of the funeral feast, or offerings committed to the funerary pyre; others could be accompaniments for the deceased, or offerings to the inhabitants or presiding spirits of the other-world. The ceramic assemblages, even of more modest grave groups, commonly imply provision of food and drink, so that the absence of joints of meat might simply indicate a preference for meat off the bone served as a stew in a pot. The regular predominance of pig, however, does suggest a widespread convention associating pork with the funerary feast, though this appears to diminish in cremation cemeteries in the later first century AD (Philpott, 1991: 197).

The provision of drink in burials before those of the late La Tène is much more equivocal, and there may in any case be a fundamental difference between the inclusion of portions of meat and the symbolic representation of the funerary feast which is implied by the inclusion of a dinner and wine service. The absence from the majority of earlier graves of pottery containers argues against the regular provision of food and drink, though it is possible that organic materials were used that have not survived.

## COMPLEMENTARY OFFERINGS

## Pottery

If any grave-goods were made expressly for funerary use, we might expect them to have been pottery. Funerary urns to contain the cremated ashes, of course, are known in a variety of distinctive forms in the European Bronze and Iron Ages, but whether accessory vessels were designed or decorated specifically for funerary use is more debatable. From the La Tène cemeteries of the Champagne pottery is certainly one of the most frequently represented of grave-goods, often in multiple numbers, and apparently buried intact, even if subsequently damaged by grave disturbance (Rigby, 2006: 62). Some of the elegant early La Tène pottery vessels from the Champagne cemeteries are decorated with a degree of finesse that might well have been specially commissioned (Harding, 2007: 79 and fig. 4, 8). The examples from Prunay, 'Le Champ la Guerre', and Caurel, in particular, are so similar in design and proportions that they might well have been from the same source or designed for the same kin group, if the motifs reflect local traditions and identities. Even in more typical assemblages there may be a combination of vessels that suggests a 'place setting' for a funerary meal (Rigby, 2006: 62) well before the introduction of Roman products induced a greater specialization in vessel types.

In the La Tène cemeteries of eastern Yorkshire, by contrast, the range and variety of ceramics is much more limited, as we have seen, though the relative uniformity in size and shape of the coarse, hand-made vessels may suggest that they were designed for funerary use. Middle Iron Age settlements in eastern Yorkshire may not have been quite as lacking in ceramics as is sometimes suggested, though the evidence for the use of pottery before the late pre-Roman Iron Age is sparse, and the range of types, though more diverse than in funerary wares, is still extremely limited. The inclusion of pottery in the eastern Yorkshire cemeteries is also extremely variable. In the Makeshift cemetery at Rudston (Rigby, 1991) the 29 graves that contained pottery vessels represent no more than 15 per cent of the total number of graves, and occurred in clusters rather than distributed regularly throughout the cemetery. Furthermore, 24 of the 29 pots were associated with animal bone, notably left *humeri* of sheep. Since most of these vessels were either broken or very fragmentary, however, they may have been residual from some rite prior to interment rather than dedicated offerings. At Wetwang Slack, by contrast, barely 20 kilometres to the south-west and broadly contemporary, only 1 grave out of 400 yielded a pot, though some pots were found in the barrow ditches. Pottery was again present in graves at Eastburn and Danes Graves not far away (Challis and Harding, 1975: fig. 31). There may have been some change of practice over time, since pots occur in the north-south oriented

graves at Makeshift from the late fourth century, whereas none of the later east-west oriented graves included pottery. Unlike their continental counterparts, pots in the Yorkshire cemeteries only occur as single vessels, and their associations, if any, are with brooches, bracelets, or beads rather than with weapons or tools. None of the known chariot burials is accompanied by a pottery vessel, nor any other burials with high-status grave-goods, but otherwise there is no clear evidence for age or gender associations.

The principal difference between the earlier Iron Age inclusion of pottery vessels in graves and later pre-Roman Iron Age practice, whether in the cremation cemeteries of the south-east or in the inhumation graves of the Durotrigan series, is that later pottery is produced on a more professional scale and with a greater range of types, indicating specialized usage within a domestic context. Hence we may identify cups, platters, and flagons in addition to a variety of bowls and jars, increasingly with Roman or Gallo-Roman imports complementing the native repertory. In these circumstances pottery vessels in graves were presumably selected for a purpose, and in some circumstances may even have been made expressly for funerary use.

A plausible case for selectivity in choice of funerary ceramics, if not for specifically dedicated types, was made by Whimster (1981: 54–7 and fig. 21) for the pottery from Durotrigan cemeteries. He noted that Brailsford's (1958) class 1 bead-rim bowls were a dominant type in graves at Maiden Castle, together with pear-shaped jars and a more functionally specific type, the handled tankard. Though these types were also found in domestic contexts, other forms of jars predominated in the latter. Equally, in the case of the late pre-Roman Iron Age cemetery from Westhampnett there was a clear preference for certain kinds of vessels, notably jars and bowls, rather than the full spectrum of forms found on domestic settlements, and some indication that the combination of vessels related to the age of the deceased. The fact that two or more vessels were found in graves of older individuals while juveniles generally only had one suggested that the grave-goods in this instance reflected the status of the dead, rather than some requirement of the funerary ritual.

Jars and beakers constituted the majority of the vessels used to contain cremations at King Harry Lane, though flagons and bowls also featured, the latter in a small minority (Millett, 1993: fig. 5a). A comparison of the phase 3 cemetery with broadly contemporary assemblages from Verulamium and Gorhambury, however, showed that the cemetery had a much greater proportion of beakers than the settlements, and equally notably the cemetery had little samian but a higher percentage of *terra nigra* and *terra rubra* in marked contrast to the settlement assemblages (ibid. 272–4). This points firmly towards selectivity in the inclusion of ceramics in the graves, based presumably upon what forms were required for the funerary devotions.

### Entertainments

Board games are not infrequently found in Romano-British burials, and they are certainly present around the time of the conquest at Stanway, where what appears to have been a complete set was included in the doctor's grave, with fragments of boards or odd gaming pieces also present in other graves and mortuary chambers. The game represented in the doctor's grave was for two players with thirteen counters apiece, and was most probably a Roman rather than native version of a 'war game'. The warrior's grave at Stanway also had a board with a set of twenty glass counters of standard Roman type placed in the south-east corner of the burial chamber. The twenty-four gaming pieces in the Welwyn Garden City grave, on the other hand, were colour-coded for four players, apparently each with six beads and bracelet fragments serving as dice. This was more probably therefore a 'race-game', though who the imagined players may have been is unclear. Dating to the last quarter of the first century BC this may represent an older insular tradition of board games played in aristocratic circles, as reflected in later Irish and Welsh literary sources.

### HEIRLOOMS AND ANTIQUES

Where grave-goods include prestigious items, there may be evidence that they were treasured over many generations, and only ultimately consigned to the grave long after the period of manufacture and general currency. This may be indicated by the degree of wear resulting from the fact that the artefact had been in circulation for a long time or by evidence of repair and modification, in the case of items such as sword scabbards perhaps involving differences in ornamental style or technical detail of construction. Items of metalwork from non-funerary contexts not infrequently show similar signs of composite workmanship, indicating that treasured objects were handed down from generation to generation (Harding, 2007).

An example might be the cast bronze arm-ring from the burial at Newnham Croft in Cambridgeshire, ornamented in low relief with diagonal panels of tendril designs against a background of irregular hatching. The tendril ornament is certainly reminiscent of the continental early La Tène Waldalgesheim style of the fourth century BC, though the use of hatching is not common in continental Europe, and the hinged opening mechanism is unique among bronze arm-rings in Britain or Europe. Jope (2000: 45–7) discussed in detail the technical features of the accompanying brooch and concluded that it should belong to the early second rather than the late third century, though the significance of its late-looking features may have been exaggerated

(Harding, 2007: 145–6). The penannular brooches, however, might well be the latest pieces in the assemblage. Particularly enigmatic is the ferrule-like bronze with pendant chains, which has been variously interpreted over the years, but perhaps most plausibly as an elaborate head-piece or crown (Gilbert, 1978: 172–4). Important for any evaluation of the date of deposition is the fact that the ornament of the arm-ring is extremely worn, to the extent that Fox (1958: fig. 6) did not even remark on the background hatching, so that it could easily have been 200 years old when buried, reinforcing the principle that grave associations indicate only contemporary deposition rather than contemporary manufacture or currency.

If some artefacts were already heirlooms when they were included in the grave, others were more probably curiosities or keepsakes. Such may have been the Lexden palstave, plainly an anomaly in a highly Romanized late first-century BC tomb. Whilst it seems improbable that this artefact could have been handed down over a millennium and more, it is not impossible that its antiquity was appreciated, endorsing the hereditary credentials of the high-ranking individual buried in the tomb. A possible parallel of broadly the same period was perhaps the ‘celt’ reported by Sir Henry Bunbury from the grave at Mildenhall in Suffolk, where workmen in 1812 uncovered ‘a human skeleton of large dimensions, stretched at full length between the skeletons of two horses, arranged in a parallel order. On one side of the warrior lay an iron sword, on the other his celt; he had a torques of gold’ (Bunbury, 1834: 609), the latter apparently melted down shortly after discovery. Sir Cyril Fox, recounting this report (1923: 81), surmised that the ‘celt’ was a Bronze Age axe, citing from Déchelette (1913: 796) the example of the socketed axe from the Hallstatt C tomb 3 in the Ferme Rouge cemetery uncovered in 1905 at Court-Saint-Étienne in Belgium (Mariën, 1958), the latter more plausibly recognized as an heirloom. The miniature socketed axe pendant from grave W57 at Arras (Stead, 1979: 85), on the other hand, was more probably simply an amulet, though amulets in the form of an edge-tool are not generally known.

## CONCLUSIONS

In contrast to continental Europe, where a small number of conspicuously constructed and furnished graves are known from the Urnfield Late Bronze Age and into the Hallstatt Iron Age, in Britain, with the notable exception of a few graves of the early La Tène period, particularly in eastern Yorkshire, it is not until the later pre-Roman Iron Age that more lavishly equipped graves appear in significant numbers. Much the same could be said of British and continental hoards, and the absence of torcs and coins from supposedly high-

status burials in south-eastern Britain in the immediately pre-Roman period reinforces the probability that there was more than one form of disposal and commemoration of the dead. The paucity of artefact associations that personalize the deceased suggests that the emphasis was upon communal identity rather than the individual, which would be consistent with the practice of fragmentation and distribution as the majority rite. This is not to say that the cult of the individual, manifest in the dynastic coinage of the late pre-Roman Iron Age in Britain, and reflected in Caesar's account of political rivalries, was not in evidence in earlier burial practices in continental Europe, but in Britain in this, as in other aspects of burials, funerary practice seems to have been conservatively insular for much of later prehistory.





## Social and ritual violence and death

In recent years the issue of violence in Iron Age society has become polarized between those who believe that it was endemic and those who believe that it has been exaggerated, particularly by conventional stereotypes of ‘warrior Celts’ based on classical and Irish literary sources. Currently, the ‘post-processual consensus that dominates academic archaeology in the United Kingdom retains, as its default position, a more or less pacifist view of the prehistoric past’ (Armit, 2011: 503). The conventional interpretation of ‘war cemeteries’ and ‘massacre sites’ in hillforts especially may have been unduly simplistic, and it is these therefore that we shall consider first.

### WAR CEMETERIES AND BURIALS OF BATTLE VICTIMS

The archetypal Iron Age war cemetery was that excavated by Wheeler (1943) in the eastern entrance at Maiden Castle, Dorset (Fig. 7.1), where several skeletons bore traces of physical trauma compatible with the sack of the hillfort by Vespasian’s Second Augustan legion. An adult male in grave P7A had an iron arrow-head buried in his spine, and another adult male in grave P7 had a small, square perforation through the left temporal bone, consistent with a Roman ballista bolt. In some instances there were multiple injuries, notably skeleton P12 whose skull bore at least nine sword cuts, a measure of ‘overkill’ that reflected either the ferocity of the attack or systematic degradation after death. In reviewing the physical evidence for warfare in Iron Age Britain Knüsel (2005) divided instances of weapon trauma into three principal categories, those inflicted with a sharp-bladed weapon, such as a sword, those resulting from crushing from a blunt instrument, and wounds from a weapon or missile that penetrated the skeleton. The first two are essentially the same classification as those offered by Wheeler (1943: 351) for the Maiden Castle war cemetery. He too had raised the question whether the peri-mortem injuries apparent on some of the victims were the cause of death, or were inflicted after death.



Fig. 7.1 Maiden Castle, Dorset, war cemetery, A, general view, B, burials P22 and P23. Photos reproduced by kind permission of the Society of Antiquaries of London from R. E. M. Wheeler, *Maiden Castle, Dorset*, 1943, plates LIIB and LXA, © reserved.

Wheeler identified Maiden Castle as one of the twenty *oppida* reportedly sacked by Vespasian in his westward advance (Suetonius, *Divus Vespasianus*, 4), and saw the war cemetery as a testimony to the Roman assault. Sharples (1991b, 1991c) raised doubts regarding this interpretation of the cemetery, claiming that less than half of the burials showed signs of trauma. Knüsel suggested that the percentage was slightly higher, but the point is immaterial, since death could have been caused by fatal wounds to the soft tissue without any concomitant marks on the skeleton. The evidence is more than sufficient to sustain the case for a violent engagement at or around the site of Maiden Castle, whether ascribed to the advance of Vespasian's Second Augustan Legion or to some other episode around the mid-first century AD. Whilst revealing a more complex story, recent re-analysis of the Maiden Castle evidence (Redfern, 2011) essentially endorses the interpretation of the war cemetery as the product of an utter rout of the native forces by the Roman army.

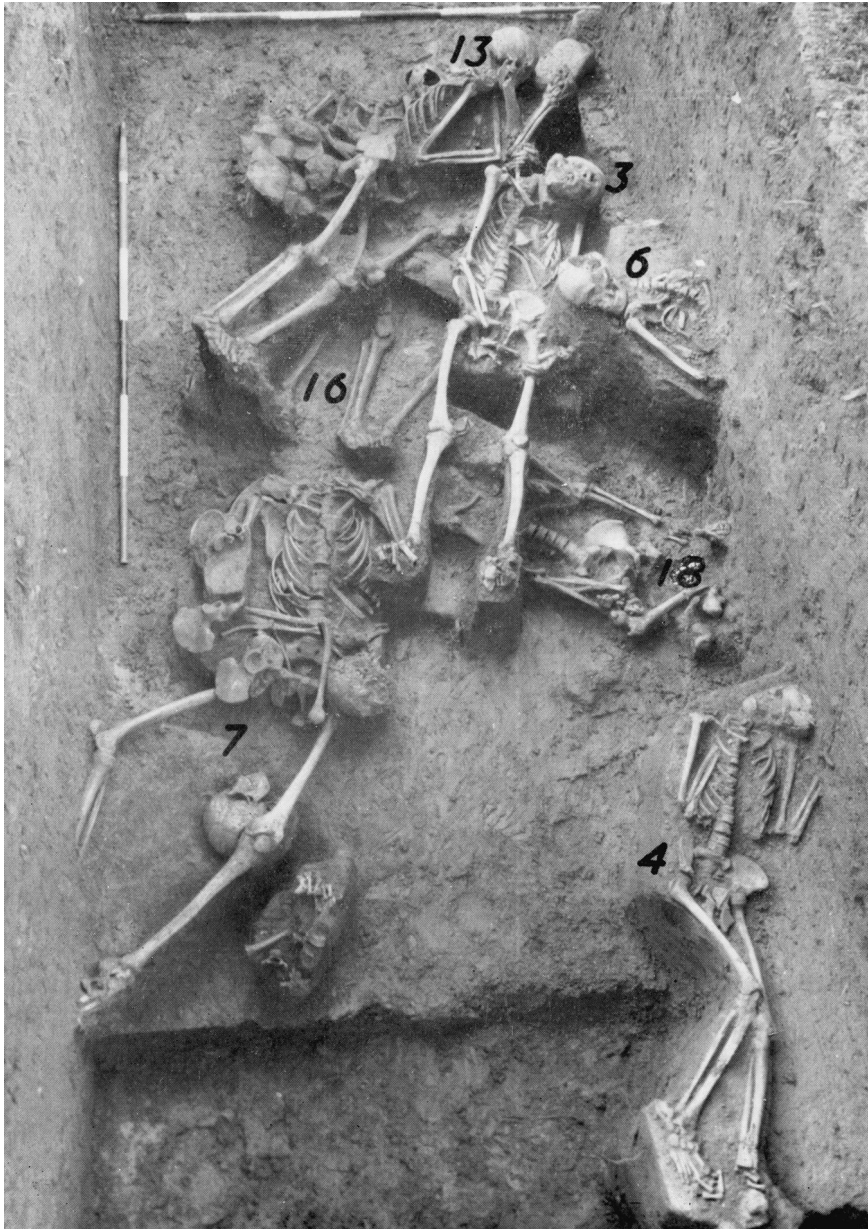
Problems remain, however, not least arising from the comparatively small size of the cemetery. From an assault on a hillfort of this size and importance, carried out with the ferocity that Wheeler inferred, can we really believe that there were only thirty-four fatalities, or are there other war cemeteries located at strategic points around the hillfort, so far undetected by survey or excavation? Drawing on his own military experience, from subaltern at Passchendaele to brigadier at El Alamein, Wheeler assumed that Vespasian would have chosen to attack the weaker of the two entrances at Maiden Castle, simply 'leaving a guard' on the western entrance to prevent escape or counter-attack from that quarter. But in an engagement of such unequal forces, might not both have been attacked simultaneously? Wheeler's trial cuttings in the western entrance were extremely limited, whilst Sharples's subsequent excavation and survey did not target this area.

There is in any event the question whether the dead from the war cemetery really had fallen in the defence of the eastern gates where they were buried, or whether they had been brought here for burial from an engagement elsewhere. Wheeler's evidence for burning of the gateway and subsequent slighting of the defences should not be discounted out of hand, though alternative explanations are possible (Sharples, 1991b: 125). Since there had already been burials in the environs of the entrance, then the location of the war cemetery behind the inner cross-rampart, where it would not have impeded access through the gates, could simply have been an extension of the traditional burial ground. Wheeler's image of haste and confusion has been as enduring as it was graphic (1945: 62), but, apart from a higher incidence than normal in Durotrigan cemeteries of double burials, and some in which the position of the body is more erratic than the standard flexed convention, there can be no doubt that the Maiden Castle war cemetery was a formal cemetery, as opposed to remains resulting from massacre and random disposal.

## MASSACRE OR DESECRATION SITES

Likewise attributed to the Roman advance is the unceremonious heaping of bodies into the ditch adjacent to the western entrance of the hillfort at Sutton Walls, Herefordshire (Fig. 7.2; Kenyon, 1953). Twenty-four skeletons were identified, though the remains were in several cases so jumbled that more than one individual had become confused together. All those that could be identified by sex were male, and all were adult, mainly young adult, except for one aged around 12. The excavator believed from their contorted postures that they had been thrown in haphazardly, some at the bottom of the ditch and others higher up, as if the ditch had been filled as the bodies were thrown in. The upper ditch fill was very disturbed, perhaps as a consequence of scavengers. Six of the dead had been decapitated, while others bore injuries indicative of violent death. None was accompanied by grave-goods, or any personal possessions, as if they had been stripped before disposal. It is almost certain that the dead extended further north along the ditch beyond the very limited areas excavated, and the inference drawn by the excavator was that these were the victims of Roman reprisals against the defenders of the hillfort. Its capture was probably part of the second phase of the Roman advance, possibly under Frontinus around AD 75, so that resistance may have been treated as rebellion by the Roman authorities, resulting in the summary executions witnessed archaeologically by the beheaded skeletons (Maull, 1953). In any event, the remains hardly conform to expectations of a formal cemetery.

One of the most gruesome spectacles from British prehistory was that uncovered in the south-western entrance at Cadbury Castle, Somerset (Barrett et al., 2000), which, despite problems of dating, is still attributed to a Roman attack on native defenders of the hillfort. The human remains were found distributed through the entrance passage and in the south guard chamber, in deposits that indicated that the gates had been burnt to the ground. More bodies and body parts were found in the layer of rubble that had subsequently been laid over the carnage, before the entrance was rebuilt and the site re-occupied. Logically one might expect that the remains would have been covered with rubble from slighting of the adjacent defences, perhaps using forced labour, but gnaw marks on bones indicated that this had been insufficient to deter scavengers. What distinguished the Cadbury remains was the fact that skulls, torsos, and articulated but truncated limbs were included among the bodies of the dead. Alcock (1972: 105) estimated that around thirty individuals were represented, men, women, and children, but specialist examination of the remains indicated that three times that number could have been involved (Forbes, 2000). There were a number of children among the victims, and a high number of juveniles, even though adults make up the majority.



**Fig.7.2** Sutton Walls, Herefordshire, skeletons in ditch by west entrance. Photo courtesy of the Royal Archaeological Institute.

A notable feature of the massacre scene was the quantity of artefacts recovered, including nearly a hundred brooches. Weaponry included more than thirty spearheads, which may have been used by either Roman or native contingents, since Roman auxiliaries commonly used types similar to later Iron Age spears. Some twenty bolt-heads, on the other hand, were of a kind used with Roman *ballistae*, and thus provide tangible evidence of a Roman assault. Additional items included iron shield bosses and hand-grips, a dagger sheath and fragment of scabbard chape, nearly thirty nails, the significance of which is unclear, and a small sheet-bronze face plaque of a kind sometimes found in Romano-Celtic votive contexts. Two of the skeletons wore copper alloy rings, and others showed green corrosion marks on fingers or toes indicating their former presence. Apart from these, the remaining artefacts were scattered at random through the carnage.

Some of the skeletal remains showed signs of physical trauma consistent with death in battle or in its aftermath, and the presence of skulls and skull fragments raises the possibility that here, as at Sutton Walls, executions may have been part of the reprisals (Barrett et al., 2000: 111). But the number of skeletons showing such indications of trauma was rather fewer than might have been expected from the victims of battle. Whilst some of the dead may have been battle victims, there were inconsistencies in the human remains that make a single, simple explanation more difficult to sustain. Individual torsos or legs, missing the rest of the body but otherwise intact, are unlikely to have resulted from the activities of scavengers. Furthermore, remains from the central and inner passageway had not been so intensively burnt as those from around the gates or the guard chamber, and hands and feet were largely unburnt, leading to the suggestion that these had been exposed to partial cremation on pyres located beyond the excavated area.

After the initial assumption that the massacre dated to the time of the conquest, Alcock (1972) soon recognized that the associated assemblage indicated an event a couple of decades or so after the first wave of military advance. That the episode coincided with a local revolt, undocumented historically but contemporary with others of the third quarter of the first century AD, seems plausible, and it is likely that the hillfort was the focus of retaliation, not simply as a defensive location but because it embodied all the traditions and rituals of the native community that encouraged resistance. All of this points to the probability that the Cadbury 'massacre' site represents a more complex set of circumstances. One possibility is that the hillfort among other functions served a role in regular funerary practice, either involving cremation or excarnation, and that the remains of these activities were deliberately desecrated. Another is that some of the remains were the severed heads of the vanquished from earlier conflicts that had been displayed as trophies in the vicinity of the gate (Barrett et al., 2000: 111). Remains from these sources may have been incorporated together with the bodies of victims of a battle in which

resistance was suppressed by Roman forces, who then made a point of desecrating and eradicating any trace of native ritual practices.

A similar interpretation has been suggested for the evidence of slaughter at Bredon Hill (otherwise Kemerton Camp), on the border of Gloucestershire and Worcestershire (Hencken, 1938), where the southern inner entrance was likewise strewn with mutilated human remains of limbs and torsos. The number of dead represented has been variously calculated, since it was clear that certain parts of the skeletons, notably skulls, were missing, but non-cranial bones indicated a minimum of sixty-four individuals. A series of skulls found across the inner entrance, where the gateway had been burnt, was interpreted as fallen trophies that had been suspended on the gates. It was not possible in many cases to determine the sex of the victims, but the majority were seemingly young adult males (*ibid.* 21), as might be consistent with defence of the hillfort.

The excavator believed that the flanking walls of the entrance had collapsed or been deliberately slighted and the debris spread over the remains. She pointed out that in this instance there was no archaeological evidence to show that the Roman army was responsible for what appeared to have been a frenzy of slaughter, though subsequent opinion swung back to a conquest episode as the likely explanation. Finds from the massacre level included seven spearheads, which Manning (in Thomas, 2005: 257) suggested may have been Roman rather than native and comparable to those from Hod Hill. None of the finds, however, was closely associated with the skeletal remains, or in any sense constituted grave-goods. Nevertheless, the inclusion of domestic or industrial artefacts, in striking contrast to Sutton Walls, as Moore (2006: 119) argued, seems odd if the occasion was a massacre in the process of defending the hillfort entrance, at whatever date. More recently three of the skeletons have been subject to radiocarbon dating, and, contrary to the presumption that the Roman army was responsible for the carnage, the date range for these remains was 170–50 cal. BC (Hurst and Western, 2012). This, together with the recent evidence from Fin Cop, Derbyshire (see below), without exactly exonerating the Romans, opens up a new window on earlier inter-community violence between native groups.

The Spetisbury massacre site (Gresham, 1939) was discovered in 1857 during the construction of the central Dorset railway, which truncated the north-eastern corner of the hillfort, so that the record is tantalizingly lacking in detail. The workmen reportedly found between 80 and 90 skeletons in ‘a pit about 35 ft. long, by 15 ft. wide, and from 4 to 9 or 10 ft. deep’ (*ibid.* 116), which was presumably the hillfort ditch. The local antiquary, Henry Durden, claimed that one skull had a piece removed by a sword cut, while another had a spearhead embedded in it. Among the skeletons were a number of artefacts, including several iron spearheads, some of Roman type, and a sword, but more surprisingly a bronze cauldron, two bucket handles, currency bars, together



with personal items like brooches and spiral rings and domestic items such as bone needles and a weaving comb. Some of these are not what we might expect in a mass war-grave, but in view of the unsupervised nature of their recovery, the surviving record is plainly not reliable to provenance and association. According to Durden's notes, in the following January a further forty skeletons were unearthed with more objects, but the location of this second find is unknown, and we can only presume that it was likewise on the alignment of the track, perhaps in the north-western sector of the hillfort ditch or not far outside it. That these burials were the result of an engagement at the time of the Roman advance west has been widely accepted (RCHM, 1970b: 246), though the date of construction and occupation of the hillfort itself has never been properly established and its 2-hectare univallate enclosure hardly qualifies as one of the major 'developed' hillforts of the region. What makes this straightforward explanation problematic is the combination of weaponry and personal ornaments with cauldron and bucket fittings, items that indicate communal feasting and drinking with festive, ceremonial, or even ritual connotations. Their inclusion suggests not just 'tidying up' after a military operation (Cunliffe, 2005: 187, 222), but the deliberate and systematic purging of the hillfort of activities that the Roman regime found abhorrent and potentially subversive. These massacre sites therefore may not simply be the result of defeat in battle; they may be a reflection of the status and role of hillforts beyond any implicit function as defensive strongholds.

The latest evidence for gruesome treatment of human remains at the time of the Roman conquest comes from recent excavations at Ham Hill, Somerset (Hilts, 2013). The presence of Roman ballista bolts suggests that the hillfort was subject to assault, but however savagely the defenders may have been cut down, it is unlikely to have been the Roman forces that were responsible for defleshing and dismembering the human remains behind the northern rampart. Given the presence within the hillfort of an enclosure, the function of which may have been ritual or ceremonial, it seems more likely that once again it was native cult practices that had been targeted for destruction by the Roman army.

All of these sites, with the exception, as it now appears, of Bredon Hill, belong essentially to the conquest horizon or its immediate aftermath. The more recent discoveries at Fin Cop, Derbyshire (Waddington, 2012), relate to an earlier period of the Iron Age. Here, in two sections across the defences spaced significantly apart, were found a total of nine burials, including several neonatal infants, of individuals who seemingly had been thrown into the ditch and covered with rubble from the rampart, in what appears to have been a massacre of women and children when the hillfort was captured and systematically destroyed. A further six burials were found in the 2012 season of excavation, reinforcing the excavators' belief that the distribution of dead in the ditch could be much more extensive. The contorted attitude of one of the skeletons from trench 1 reflected their summary execution, when they had

apparently been thrown or dumped, dead or dying, from the outer edge of the ditch. The case for regarding this as a massacre at the time of the rampart's destruction was carefully argued, based upon the mass of stony debris with voids in the ditch and the lack of evidence from any of the sections for cumulative silting (*ibid.* 182–4). None of the skeletons showed evidence of injury, so that death was therefore presumed to have been caused by soft tissue injuries, with the possible exception of an adolescent (skeleton 8) in trench 5, who had a scalp injury and may have been dispatched by the sizeable boulder that lay over his or her skull. Those in the upper filling of the ditch, still essentially part of the rampart destruction debris, had seemingly been disturbed by scavengers, so that skeletal parts were missing, but there was nothing to suggest wilful dismemberment. There was no suggestion at Fin Cop that the burials were concentrated around the entrance in the defence of the hillfort, and it seemed therefore that this was a case of slaughter of non-combatant women and children, their men presumably having been slain in an engagement elsewhere or taken into slavery. Whatever the circumstances of the conflict, the hillfort was never re-occupied in the Iron Age after its late fifth- or fourth-century occupation.

The Fin Cop discoveries have also prompted renewed interest in the nineteenth- and earlier twentieth-century finds from War Ditches, Cherry Hinton, Cambridge (Pickstone and Mortimer, 2012). This small, univallate ring-work was apparently destroyed around the early fourth century BC shortly after the construction of its rampart and ditch. Within the chalk rubble and charcoal in the lower ditch filling at various points around the perimeter, including adjacent to the entrance, were human skeletons and partly articulated remains that the recent excavators were persuaded were the product of 'a cataclysmic event' (*ibid.* 56) involving the destruction of the site's defences and the slaughter of its occupants, and resulting in its abandonment for several centuries. Part of the problem with War Ditches is that it is hardly a typical hillfort—its ditch for example becomes narrower and shallower by the entrance, the very reverse of many hillforts, where the earthworks are most impressive in scale and complexity by the entrance—and there is little evidence for the nature of its internal occupation. Nevertheless, its role as a regional focus, perhaps ritual and ceremonial rather than political or economic, could have made it a target for assault in inter-community conflict.

Other sites could perhaps have witnessed massacres, though inadequately documented from older discoveries. The five skeletons recorded outside the defences at nearby Wandlebury (Taylor and Denton, 1977) are intriguing, since the location is where a regular Iron Age cemetery may have been sited, and the reference to other skeletons in the edges of the excavated trench suggests a more extensive cemetery. The fact that bodies were apparently piled into a pit or ditch, one on top of the other, and that one bore a sword cut on the mandible, might even suggest another massacre site. In the absence

of grave-goods or associated finds, however, we cannot even be sure of the date of these burials, which was assumed solely on the basis of proximity to the hillfort.

## RITUAL AND JUDICIAL VIOLENCE

Identifying violence is relatively straightforward when it impacts upon skeletal remains, but explaining the cause of such violence is obviously more speculative. Given the much-quoted documentary evidence for head-hunting among Celtic-speaking Iron Age communities, it is perhaps surprising that there is not more evidence for decapitation in Iron Age cemeteries in Britain. Notable exceptions, as we have seen, are pit 10 and cist 46 at Harlyn Bay, where the orderly disposition of skulls suggests a ritual deposit. We have noted the skulls from Bredon Hill that may have been displayed across the hillfort entrance and those that were placed in the ditch at Great Barford. A striking continental example is from the Wasserburg by Buchau in Baden- Württemberg (Fig. 7.3A), where the skulls of five children and one adult woman were deposited in liminal locations around the various phases of the palisaded enclosure, apparently as votive offerings, not necessarily of sacrificial victims but possibly of curated skulls (Baumeister, 2009; Menotti et al., 2014). The nearest comparison in Britain is from the Glastonbury 'lake-village' (Fig. 7.3B; Coles and Minnitt, 1995: 203), where seven skulls were found just beyond the perimeter fence, though the effect is here qualified by an equal number within the settlement. Interpretation of such deposits is plainly speculative, but the fact that they involve skulls alone indicates a degree or selectivity that argues for a votive purpose.

Complete or near-complete skeletons can also show signs of violence. Particularly weird to contemporary perception is the recent discovery at West Knowle, Wiltshire, of a woman's burial in which the feet had been severed (CA 291: 8–9). The double burial with foetus from a square-ditched barrow in area 5 at Garton Slack (Fig. 7.4; Brewster, 1980) is especially susceptible to interpretations that may be influenced by more recent social attitudes. An initial anomaly was the layout of its burial pit, with extension apparently designed for a chariot burial of which there was no trace. The two individuals, one female between 20 and 25 years of age, the other probably male, though displaying some gracile features, and slightly younger, were buried close together, their tightly flexed legs interlocked, with their heads at the north end of the grave. The male skeleton was resting on its back, arms raised with hands together under his chin, perhaps even tied at the wrists, and with his head turned towards his companion, whose head was resting on his shoulder. She was resting on her left side, with her right hand by his right elbow, where a wooden stake, driven into the base of the grave, appears to have

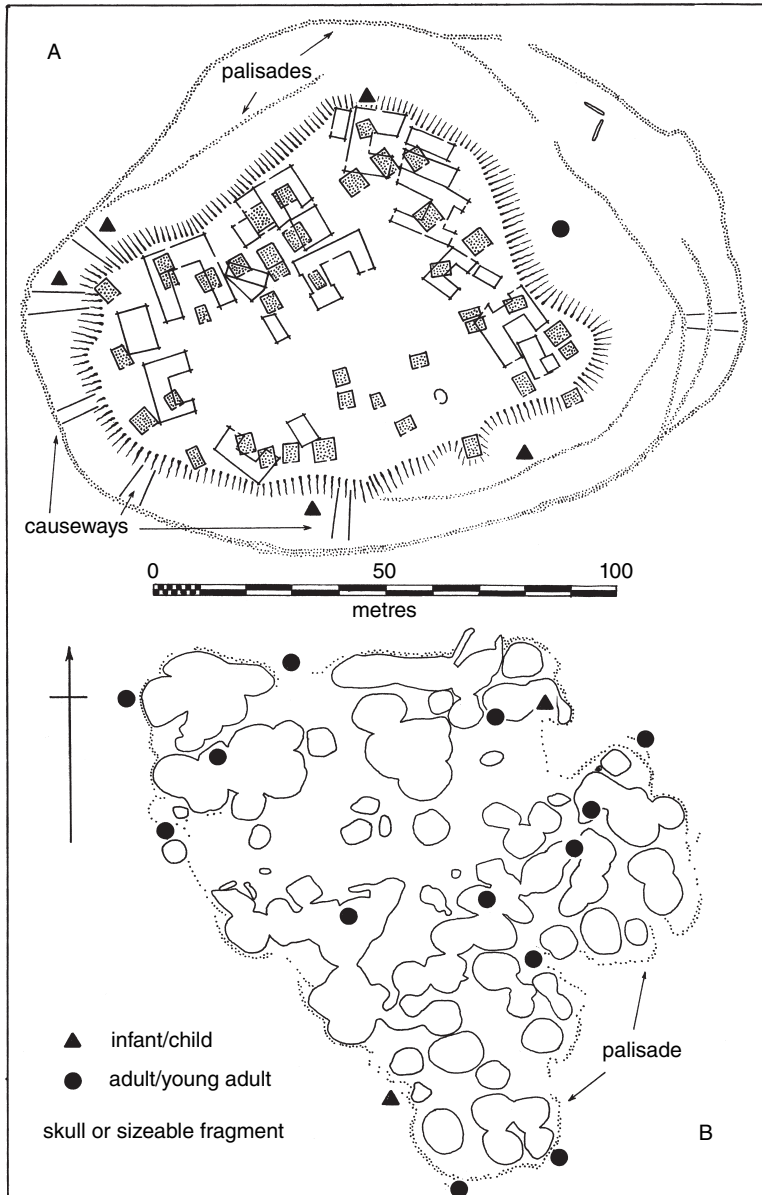


Fig. 7.3 Skull deposits around settlements, A, Wasserburg Buchau, Baden-Württemberg, B, Glastonbury, Somerset. Drawings adapted from Kimmig, 1992 and Baumeister, 2009; and from Bulleid and Gray, 1917, and Coles and Minnitt, 1995.

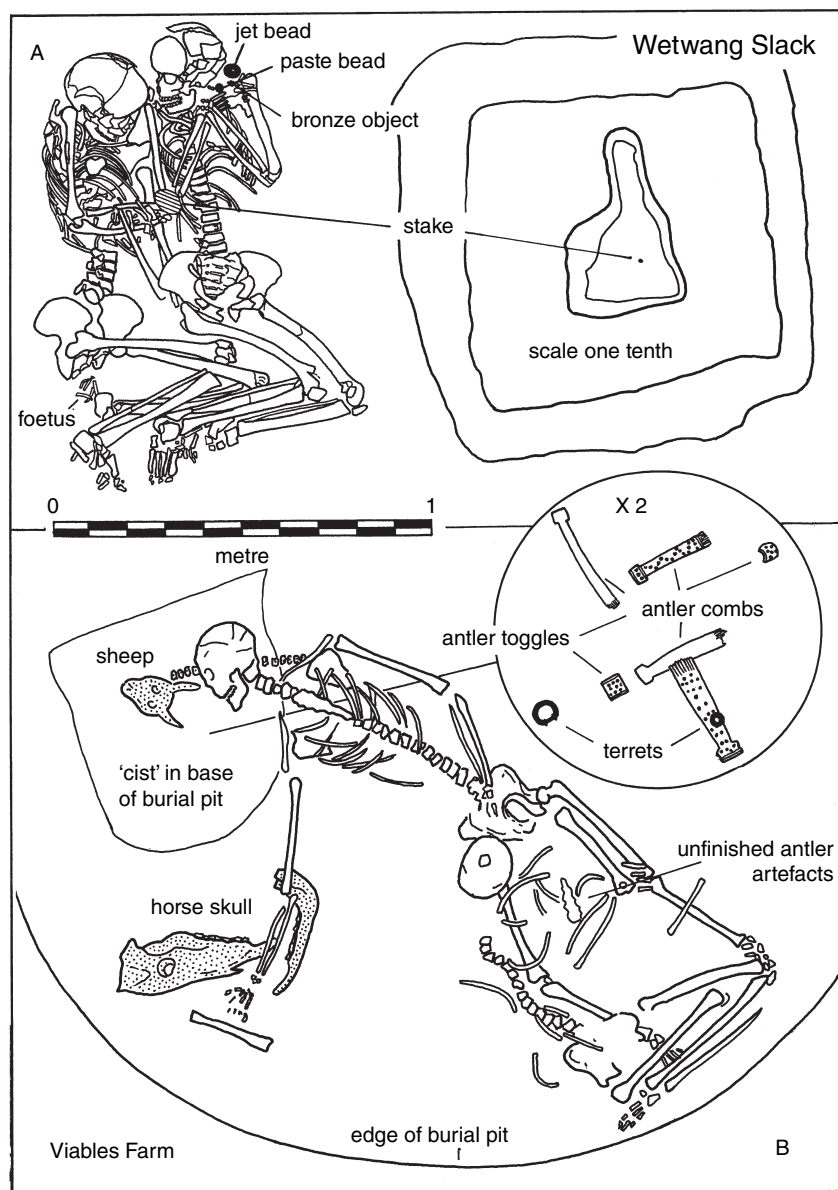


Fig. 7.4 Double burials, A, Garton/Wetwang Slack, Yorkshire, Area 5, B, Viables Farm, Basingstoke, Hampshire. Drawings adapted from Brewster, 1980 and Millett and Russell, 1982.

secured the two bodies in position. The excavator initially argued that both had been buried alive (Brewster, 1975: 115), though the skeletons show no obvious sign of struggle or contortion, and he subsequently suggested (Brewster, 1980: 673) that the man was dead, but that the woman may still have been alive. Beneath the woman's pelvis was a foetus, 2–3 months premature, which he speculated could have been born in the grave at the moment of its mother's death or more probably just before burial (ibid. 674). The only grave-goods were a jet ring, a paste bead, and a bronze pendant, all located by the male's left shoulder, but not closely datable, and hardly indicative of abnormal status. The excavator imagined that the couple interred in the grave had offended a social taboo and paid the penalty, and though other interpretations are obviously possible, the wooden stake seems to imply antipathy, whether outrage or fear, on the part of the living community towards the dead.

Another possible example, cited earlier, of ritual or judicial killing is burial 21 from West Lane, Kemble (King et al., 1996), a crouched inhumation of a young adult male kneeling face down and with hands together between the feet as if tied to his ankles. The body posture and the fact that it had been covered by a large limestone slab suggests a desire to keep it firmly suppressed.

Re-examination of the Danebury pit burials (Craig et al., 2005) indicated that these remains had been more extensively mutilated than was initially apparent. Most puzzling are those that involve partial remains of bodies, either torsos separated from head and limbs or articulated limbs divorced from the rest of the body. Cunliffe's 'simplest explanation' (1995: 76) was that this resulted from the transfer of body parts from excarnation sites elsewhere, though he acknowledged the possibility of other explanations for partial deposition, including ritual killing and dismemberment and even cannibalism. The treatment of the pelvic bones seems especially anomalous, and the pelvic assemblage in pit 1020 was certainly indicative of dismemberment and 'denigration of the deceased' (Craig et al., 2005: 175). The heads of the femurs were still attached once the legs had been severed from the trunk of a young adult male (Cunliffe, 1995: 77) in an act of conspicuous violence, which perhaps argues for deliberate violation of the dead in other instances. The absence of the skull or the occurrence of skulls in isolation in pits occasions less surprise in circumstances in which dismemberment was common. In some cases complete inhumations in pits were so tightly crouched or flexed that they appear to have been bound. Hooper (1991: 428–9) had noted ten individuals at Danebury whose complete or partial remains bore injuries, most of which would have been fatal, inflicted by sword or similar bladed weapon, including three samples that bore multiple injuries. Yet these individuals were not necessarily all victims of ritual or judicial killing.

One respect in which the Danebury pit burials are unusual is the inclusion of multiple burials in one pit. Pit 923, for example, contained the remains of ten individuals, men, women, and children, represented by whole or partial

skeletons or by skull alone. Pit 1078 totalled eleven, likewise male, female, and children in varying degrees of completeness. The bones from pit 379 showed evidence of 'weapon-induced trauma' whilst the mandibles of three juvenile skulls in pit 2509 showed traumatic injury 'consistent with decapitation at the level of the C2 or C3 vertebrae. The homogeneity of these injuries and their simultaneous deposition strongly argues the case for ritual killing' (Craig et al., 2005: 170). This last pit contained material of ceramic phase 3, that is, contemporary with the destruction by burning of the phase 2 inner entrance of the east gateway, so that it is conceivable that slaughter comparable to that witnessed at Cadbury or Bredon Hill may have accompanied that destruction, the remains of which were deposited in pits, rather than left in the entrance passage itself.

### SELF-SACRIFICE, 'GRIEF SUICIDE', AND 'RETAINER SACRIFICE'

There are a number of instances of double or even multiple burials where the dead appear to have been interred simultaneously, that is, where there is no archaeological evidence that the second or subsequent burials have intruded upon the original grave and no provision by way of wooden or stone chamber, whereby access could have been provided for subsequent use of the tomb. It is, of course, always possible that two people might die at the same time, by accident, by act of violence, or by mutually contracted illness. It is also possible that the body of one individual may have been curated until a close partner died in order that they might be interred together. But we are bound to consider the possibility that dependent members of the family or household of the deceased were buried alongside their master or mistress as part of the prevailing social and ritual convention. In the case of the man and woman buried in grave VI at the Hohmichele, the careful disposition of the furnishings clearly indicates a single joint interment, and the excavator speculated whether the second individual may have accompanied the first through voluntary or enforced custom (Riek, 1962: 69), in effect exemplifying the practice of 'grief suicide' or *suttee*.

*Suttee*, an Anglo-Indian term for the self-sacrifice of a woman whose husband pre-deceased her, refers to the act of immolation on the pyre of the dead man (Storm, 2013). Far from being regarded as reprehensible, suicide in Hindu tradition was revered as an act of supreme virtue that could atone for the sins of both husband and wife, and the prospective *satī* was believed to exercise near-divine powers. It is thought to have been introduced to India by Scythians, and in variant forms had widespread currency in Indo-European societies. Pomponius Mela's account of the first century AD (*de Situ Orbis*, iii, 15) stresses the voluntary self-sacrifice of wise men (*prudenteriores*) in India on

the pyre, though it is not entirely clear whether this was to accompany the dead, to achieve glory, or simply to avoid the indignities of old age. A variant form of grief suicide was Virgil's version of the death of Dido on a pyre after the departure of Aeneas from Carthage.

Caesar's reference (*DBG*, VI, 19) to the Gaulish practice of sacrificing animals on the pyre could certainly be consistent with archaeological evidence. But his further assertion that in the recent past slaves and clients were likewise sacrificed on the pyre together with other possessions of the deceased gives almost the same impression of an addition intended to repel a Roman audience as his earlier description (*DBG*, VI, 16) of the sacrifice of criminals, when he seemingly cannot resist adding that in the absence of criminals they resort to sacrificing the innocent. Allowing for political propaganda, therefore, we might infer that the livelihoods if not the lives of dependants might well have been forfeit on the death of their client master, but that animal sacrifice was more probably the accepted substitute.

A variant on one or other of these practices may be witnessed in the burials from Viabes Farm, Basingstoke, Hampshire, which have been seen as an example of 'retainer sacrifice' (Fig. 7.4). The evidence for this rests partly in the disposition of the burials, the fact that the older female lay crouched with her head on the pelvis of the younger, extended female inhumation, in what the writers of the report saw as 'a subservient position' (Millett and Russell, 1982: 87), and partly in the apparent 'pairing' of the associated assemblages, which was most apparent in the two sets of antler combs, one decorated, the other plain, and the two terrets, one of silvered bronze, the other of antler. This pairing, with a 'dichotomy in quality' (*ibid.* 87), suggested a possible disparity in rank between the two inhumed individuals. This assumes, of course, that the grave-goods, which were in a separate cist at the base of the grave and not directly associated with either skeleton, belonged to the dead and reflected their relative ranks, whereas the pairing of combs was in fact with one plain and one decorated in each set. An alternative view might be that there was only one burial, that of the young woman, who was accompanied by grave-goods, both everyday and quality items, the remains of cattle, sheep, and horses, and her attendant, who would doubtless have been responsible for them all. The case for retainer sacrifice or self-sacrifice in this instance, therefore, appears quite strong, though not on the basis of dividing the grave-goods between mistress and attendant.

## THE EAST YORKSHIRE SPEAR RITUAL

Several of the graves in the cemeteries of eastern Yorkshire display an extraordinary funerary ritual which appears to have involved multiple spearing of



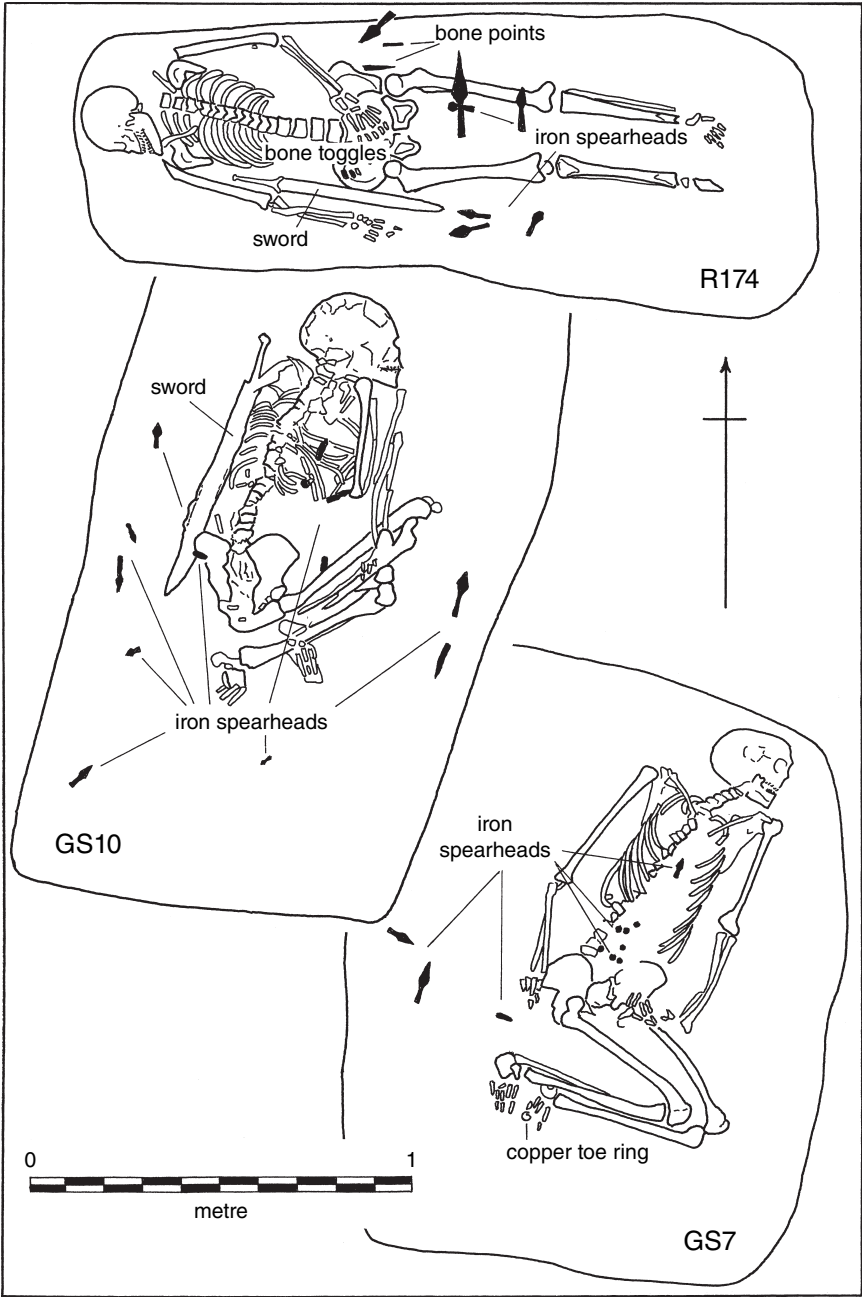


Fig. 7.5 Yorkshire 'spear ritual': Rudston grave 174, Garton Station grave 10 and grave 7. Drawings adapted from Stead, 1991.

the corpse within the grave before final infilling (Fig. 7.5). The evidence was clearest in the four round barrow burials at Garton Station. In GS10 six spears seemed to have been thrust into the corpse, while eight more were scattered in an arc around the lower part of the crouched skeleton, seemingly hurled into the grave from different angles. Yet the body had been provided with protection in the form of a leather-covered wooden shield, remains of which adhered to the four spear-points that had targeted the rib area. It was also equipped with a sword. In the case of GS7 there was no surviving evidence of a shield over the corpse, though there was evidence of wood on some spearheads. Four appeared to have penetrated the waist, with three more at a higher level in the same area, one had penetrated the chest, and three more lay behind the corpse. In GS5 four spears had iron points and two had bone points. Two of each had targeted the chest, the others, including one iron point that again retained traces of a leather bound wooden shield, had been aimed at the pelvic area. Finally, GS4 had been almost totally covered by a shield, the iron spines of which were located over the skull and shoulders and over the tightly flexed legs. One spearhead lay behind the feet and two others were well above the corpse in the grave filling. The Garton Station assemblages not only provide evidence for shields that did not employ metal bindings, and in consequence were less likely to survive archaeologically, but also demonstrate that shields could be present in graves that otherwise lacked weapons as grave-goods.

The Garton Station pattern is matched by grave R174 at Rudston, where seven iron spearheads and two bone points were found distributed between the knees and ribs of the corpse. Once again wooden deposits indicated the presence of a shield, through which one iron point had penetrated up to its socket. The deceased in this instance was also equipped with an iron sword, lying between his right arm and chest. Stead (1991: 33) was inclined to include several more of the Rudston graves as showing evidence of this spear ritual, though some of these, as argued earlier, may in fact have had spears, or broken spears, included as standard grave-goods. Chariot burial 1 at Wetwang Slack (Dent, 1985) also contained a scatter of seven spearheads distributed in such a random fashion that they hardly appear to have been part of the warrior's equipment, which again included a shield as well as his sword and scabbard. From their various angles of rest the excavator concluded that they must have been broken before being placed in the grave, but their arbitrary disposition could equally be explained by a spearing ritual.

Different from either burials with spears or burials displaying the spear ritual are at least two in which the deceased had been speared before interment. From the Rudston cemetery burial R94 had an iron spearhead embedded in the vertebrae from behind and R152 likewise had been speared through the chest from behind, in both cases presumably *peri-mortem* injuries. Even allowing that spearing was the cause of death, why the spear point should still have been embedded in the corpse in the grave is not clear.

A common interpretation of the spear ritual is that it related to 'ghost killing', whereby a malevolent spirit that was presumably perceived as a threat to the surviving community might be neutralized. An alternative possibility is that it was to nullify by anticipation threats to the dead in the afterlife or in a vulnerable journey thereto. The distribution of multiple spearheads certainly suggests a collective responsibility by a number of individuals gathered around the grave. It evidently applied only to a very limited number of individuals, some perhaps warriors, though not exclusively so.

### CANNIBALISM

The consensus among most recent commentators has been that there is no conclusive evidence for cannibalism being practised in Iron Age Britain or Gaul. A case has been advanced by Taylor (2001), but at most the number of possible instances is extremely limited, so that it can hardly be regarded as an integral part of Iron Age ritual practice. It is surely significant that Caesar makes no reference to any such practices, since, had it been even remotely suspected, he would hardly have missed an opportunity for propaganda designed to disgust a Roman audience. Ironically, the only reference in classical sources to anthropophagy in Iron Age Europe is Strabo's reference to flesh-eating among the Irish:

Concerning this island I have nothing to relate, other than that its inhabitants are more savage than the Britons, since they heavy-eaters and consume human flesh, deeming it legitimate to eat their fathers when they die . . . and yet eating human flesh is said to be a custom of the Scythians also, and forced by necessity during sieges the Celts, Iberians and several other peoples are said to have practised it.

(Strabo, *Geography*, IV, V, 4)

This account, which even the author acknowledges has no basis in the evidence of witnesses, seems to conflate cannibalism as a regular practice with ritual cannibalism and cannibalism induced by extreme starvation, and may well be the product of that process of repetition and transference from one remote zone to another of commonplace but fanciful rumours that is not uncommon in classical sources (Killeen, 1976). Consuming human flesh out of extreme necessity during sieges is of a different order, and was alluded to by Caesar in reference to the Gauls' resistance against the invasions of Cimbri and Teutones at the end of the second century (*DBG*, VII, 77). The principal classical source on cannibalism is Herodotus, who refers to people north of the Black Sea who dress like the Scythians but have their own language and who are the only tribe among the Greeks' barbarian neighbours who are cannibals (*History*: 4.106). Other peoples to the east and north-east of the Caspian

practised endocannibalism, that is, they ate their dead as part of the funeral feast (*History*: 4.26), while some killed off the elderly and consumed them (*History*: 1.216), practices to which Pomponius Mela (*de Situ Orbis* iii.15) also alludes in India. It is hard to evaluate whether even these limited historical references have any basis of truth, or whether they are simply fictional and formulaic descriptions of barbaric practices. Murphy and Mallory (2000) also posited the possibility that the reports represented a misunderstanding of religious beliefs, as, they argued, might easily happen in the case of Christian belief in transubstantiation, or a misinterpretation of funerary practice among nomadic peoples, who may have disarticulated and perhaps defleshed those who died in summer in order to transport the remains more hygienically until they could be interred in traditional burial grounds. Post-mortem processing of the dead might equally explain any cut marks found on bones in a later prehistoric European context, so that these need not be an indication of cannibalism. Conversely, of course, consumption of flesh need not have left cut marks on bones at all.

Among categories of cannibalism that Taylor (2001) identified from cultural contexts worldwide, three might in principle be relevant to the treatment of the dead by Iron Age communities, namely warfare-related cannibalism, involving degradation of enemies, ritual-sacrificial cannibalism, and reverential funerary cannibalism. Archaeologically, it is hard to adduce unequivocal evidence that would prove cannibalism, let alone determine which category was involved. Gerald Dunning (1976: 116–17) advanced an entirely rational case for interpreting the scatter of bones of a young adult female deposited below the paving of period II on site III at Salmonsbury, Gloucestershire, as evidence of cannibalism, involving the extraction of marrow from long bones and removal of the brain from the shattered skull. He saw a clear distinction between these remains and both intact inhumations and disarticulated bones found elsewhere on the site. Stanford noted cut marks on a single human bone that had been butchered in much the same way as the faunal assemblage at Croft Ambrey (Stanford, 1974: 220), but recognized that this was still only limited and tenuous evidence for cannibalism. More recently a case was made for the remains from Alveston cave in south Gloucestershire, again on the basis that bone had been split for the extraction of marrow in the same manner that was used for animal bones. From the later Bronze Age a sandbank near the Eton Rowing Lake site in the Thames valley (Allen and Hacking, 2000: 90–1) appears to have been a location for ritual activities involving human remains, and slightly further downstream another series of bones had seemingly been cut and smashed for the extraction of marrow in a manner that would be consistent with cannibalistic practices.

One of the more systematic investigations of possible cannibalism in later prehistoric Europe was the comparative study of human and animal bones

from Velim-Skalka in Bohemia (Harding et al., 2007), an enclosed site of the late Middle–early Late Bronze Age Lausitz culture. The function of the site was clearly neither simply domestic nor funerary, and the high incidence of both human and animal remains in the site's ditches and pits suggested a cult centre. Knüsel and Outram (2006) proposed a set of criteria as indicators of cannibalism, which emphasized the occurrence together and similar treatment of human and animal remains, including peri-mortem fractures that might be attributed to marrow or brain retrieval. Evidence of cooking or burning might also be indicative, though human teeth marks on bone seem a less likely outcome. In the case of Velim, the conclusion from the comparison was that cannibalism was not practised (Knüsel et al., 2007), though it is not obvious why ritualistic cannibalism should necessarily follow the same conventions as the preparation and consumption of meat from animals.

## CULTURAL MODIFICATION OF HUMAN REMAINS

The modification of human bone, notably of skull fragments, was a practice of considerable antiquity, as was already noted by Mrs Cunnington (1923: 41 and pl. 26, 9) in discussing the All Cannings Cross assemblage. This included a perforated disc, presumably used as a pendant charm, as doubtless was the example from Glastonbury (Bulleid and Gray, 1917: 405 and pl. LXIII, B59).

Among the most striking examples of modified human remains are the skulls from Hunsbury hillfort and from Hillhead broch, Caithness, both of which were perforated through the top of the cranium with three small drill holes (Fig. 7.6A, B). More recently, a skull with four perforations was recovered from the ritual site in the Cambridgeshire Fens at Godwin Ridge (Evans, 2013). The conventional view is that these were for suspension (Armit and Ginn, 2007: 125), though it is not clear why more than one hole should be required for this purpose, or more particularly why it was necessary to have three holes arranged in a triangle. It is possible that skulls, whether of enemies or venerated ancestors, were displayed in dedicated shrines or in public places like hillfort gateways, and that skull perforations were for attaching headgear or ornaments such as plumes or crowns. Crowns are certainly known archaeologically, and the leaf-crown is commonly represented in stone sculpture and in La Tène metalwork. The Hunsbury skull was probably contemporary with the middle pre-Roman Iron Age occupation of the hillfort. The Hillhead skull, on the other hand, has been radiocarbon dated to a later Iron Age horizon (Tucker and Armit, 2009), as has the perforated cranium fragment from Lower Dounreay, also in Caithness (Shapland and Armit, 2012), suggesting longevity of tradition through the 'long' Atlantic Iron Age.



**Fig. 7.6** Perforated human skulls, A, Hunsbury, Northamptonshire, B, Hillhead, Caithness. Photos (A) courtesy Northampton Museums and Art Gallery, and (B) copyright National Museums of Scotland.

## SACRED SITES AND CULT SACRIFICE

Evidence from Iron Age Europe suggests that the focus of ritual activity could range from small, domestic shrines to sacred places in the natural landscape or major enclosures that might have witnessed ceremonial activities on a communal scale. Exceeding anything yet known in the insular Iron Age are the major Gaulish ritual enclosures at Gournay-sur-Aronde (Brunaux et al., 1985;

Brunaux and Rapin, 1994; Lejars, 1994) and Ribemont-sur-Ancre (Brunaux, 1998; Duda, 1998), which are remarkable for the sheer scale and quantity of their human, faunal, and artefactual deposits. Across Europe an association with water, springs, lakes, or wetlands is a recurrent theme, as in the case of La Tène itself, where several human skeletons were found within the timber debris and artefacts of the lakeside deposits, or at the source of the Seine, where *ex voto* deposits were dedicated to the presiding deities. In Britain the concentration of river finds is well known, but the evidence for any particular location as the focus of ritual activity is harder to find. Further downstream from the Eton Rowing Lake site a series of timber structures dating from the early and middle Iron Age, consisting of rows of oak uprights extending outwards from the bank across the channel, are reminiscent of the 'bridges' at La Tène and have been interpreted as bridges or jetties (Fig. 2.7A; Allen and Hacking, 2000: 91). Fragments of human bone in close proximity to the timber structures certainly suggest that these were platforms from which ritual deposits may have been made, much as has been suggested for the Middle Bronze Age timber platforms at Flag Fen, Peterborough. The closest parallel for the Eton Rowing Lake deposits, however, are those from the middle and later pre-Roman Iron Age sanctuary site at Godwin Ridge in the Cambridgeshire Fens (Evans, 2013), where, in addition to the human skull with four perforations, numerous human and animal skeletal remains were recovered. The two skulls found at Site 1 on the river Crouch in Essex on a timber platform that was dated to the Late Bronze Age could likewise have been cult offerings in a narrow tidal creek associated with salt production (Wilkinson and Murphy, 1995).

There are several sites in northern Britain where discoveries in recent years have suggested that landscape features, or the deities associated with them, may have been the significant focus of ritual veneration. One among these is the High Pasture Cave in south Skye. The existence of the underground cave system and archaeological deposits had been known for some years, but it was not until 2004 that the significance of the Iron Age structures around the cave entrance became apparent. A flight of steps originally gave access to the cave, and in the stairwell several human skeletons were recovered (Birch and Wildgoose, 2005). The forecourt area was at one time enclosed, and saw a succession of activity involving hearths and an accumulation of burnt material that provided a consistent series of radiocarbon dates over the second half of the first millennium BC. Broadly contemporary were deposits in the caves below, including those from the Bone Passage, in which a high proportion of pig bones was remarkable (Birch and Wildgoose, 2007), given the minor role normally played by pig in domestic assemblages.

There are certain affinities between the High Pasture Cave site and Mine Howe on Orkney. Mine Howe has also yielded human burials, though it hardly ranks as either a cemetery or a domestic settlement. This unique site

comprises a ditched enclosure around a natural drumlin, into which a set of stone spiral stairs with half landing descends to a cistern some 5 metres below the entrance. Stone-lined wells accessed by stone steps are known elsewhere, notably in the broch at Gurness, but Mine Howe has no evidence of a monumental round-house. Just beyond the entrance to its ditched enclosure, however, a stone-built structure, interpreted as a smithy for both ferrous and especially non-ferrous metalworking, had inserted into its floor a grave containing the supine inhumation of a young adult woman (Card et al., 2005a), while a flexed inhumation of an adult male was found just outside the smithy (Card et al., 2005b). Archaeomagnetic dating for the primary hearth in the smithy suggested its use around the turn of the millennia BC/AD, but artefactual evidence, including moulds for door-knob spear-butts, suggested that the site may have continued in use for several centuries. Midden material and animal bone from the surrounding ditch, together with a further burial of a child in a slab-lined grave set in its upper filling (Card and Downes, 2003), suggest that the site may have had a ritual significance over a prolonged period.

One of the most graphic instances of ritual execution or human sacrifice is the assemblage from the Sculptor's Cave at Covesea in Morayshire (Benton, 1931; Shepherd, 1995, 2007). The site is difficult of access, and comprises a spacious cavern entered by twin passage-ways that appear to have been one focus of activity during the site's later prehistoric periods of use. A renewed programme of osteological analysis and accelerator mass spectrometry (AMS) dating (Armit et al., 2011) has recently clarified both the dating of the accumulated deposits and the nature of trauma represented. There were evidently two main periods of activity, the first in the Late Bronze Age, associated with bronzes assigned to a regional sub-group of the Ewart Park industrial phase, and the second in the para-Roman Iron Age, from around the second to fourth centuries AD, from which pins, beads, tweezers, and even coins were recovered. Armit rightly did not discount intermittent activity in the intervening earlier Iron Age, given the lack of a diagnostic artefact assemblage in this part of Scotland at that period. The stratigraphy in the cave entrance showed no distinct floor levels for this intervening period, but deposits continued to accumulate in a manner that would have been consistent with episodic use. The great majority of the human bones from the cave belongs to the earlier phase of activity, and includes a high proportion of juvenile remains. Shepherd (2007) argued that the heads of children had been curated and displayed at the entrance to the cave, and some post-mortem modification was detected in the more recent analysis that would support this view. The evidence for decapitation, in the form of seven cut marked cervical vertebrae, mostly adult, however, is now firmly established as relating to the later Iron Age phase of activity, though whether this represents a single episode in the later third or early fourth century (Armit et al., 2011: 276) or a recurrent ritual practice remains unresolved.



The function and use of the structural complex at Berst Ness on the Knowe of Skea on Westray in the Orkneys has yet to be established, though the excavators regarded the lack of the normal range of artefacts as militating against domestic occupation (Moore and Wilson, 2005). The oval or sub-rectangular plan of the central building and those that flanked its northern slopes are not without parallel in the later Iron Age of Caithness and Orkney, at Forse, or in the post-broch phases of the Howe (Harding, 2004: 278–80), including the incorporation of ‘radial’ divisions emanating from the inner wall-face, but the hearth of the central building, though again not out of keeping in the post-broch sequence, is elaborated in a way that suggests a special function. In the modified entrance the six adult human skeletons, successively deposited, were disturbed and not complete, though the best preserved and earliest, which had been placed in a small cist, conformed to the tightly crouched on right side convention.

The majority of the Knowe of Skea burials, however, came from the external structures, and are remarkable for two reasons. First, around sixty of the hundred or so burials were of children or neonatal skeletons. Adults tended to be buried in proximity to the central building, with the infants more widely dispersed. Occasionally the human burials appear to have been accompanied by animal burials, in one instance by the dismembered remains of an otter, in other cases by sheep or cattle remains. The second unusual feature was that burials were incorporated into the walls, in one instance in structure E in a cist built into the wall, but also in the rubble core of walls. Sometimes the burials appear to have been built into the rubble foundations, or in the collapsed debris that represented the closure episode of the previous phase of building activity. Elsewhere we have noted the occasional occurrence of human burials in structural debris, and it is certainly possible that, in the complex structural sequences represented by these Atlantic Iron Age sites, burials signalled the closure of one construction episode and the beginning of the next, or that conversely constructional change was triggered by a significant death. A third factor noted by the excavators was the presence of metalworking debris, but it is as yet not clear that this was on a scale greater than characterizes a number of later Iron Age settlements in Atlantic Scotland. The use of the Knowe of Skea appears to span the first half of the first millennium AD, with radiocarbon dates from skeletal remains calibrating from the second century BC to the mid-first millennium AD (Moore, 2005).

The function of the site, which accords with expectations of neither settlement nor cemetery, and the choice of this exposed promontory, has excited considerable debate. In the more recent past the area was known for the fact that bodies exposed to the salt air could be preserved without embalming, and it is possible that burial in the loose rubble was intended to have this effect without exposing the dead to scavengers. Nevertheless, the substantial buildings, if not domestic, must have served a role in relation to ritual or funerary activities, and the high proportion of infants, reminiscent perhaps of the sacrificial

deposits from the Sculptor's Cave but lacking the evidence of skeletal trauma, reinforces a belief that this was not a straightforward community cemetery.

It has been suggested earlier that southern British hillforts may have had a central role in funerary practices, and perhaps more generally in ritual activities and ceremonials. Apart from the supposed Danebury shrines, little structural evidence has been uncovered for such activities. Recent excavations at Ham Hill, however, exposed a rectilinear enclosure, within which there was minimal evidence of any domestic or agricultural occupation. On the floor of the ditch were found several skeletons that had seemingly been covered by material from the inner bank, deliberately thrown into the ditch, on top of which were deposits of butchered animal bone and several human skulls. The excavators tentatively concluded that this may have been a place of ceremonial assembly, which, as has been suggested above, could have been a target for assault by Roman forces at the time of the conquest.

Finally the enigmatic site not far from the shore at Cliffs End, Pegwell Bay, in east Kent (Bradley, 2013; McKinley et al., 2013, 2014) illustrates continuity in ritual activity over a millennium or more from the Bronze Age to the middle Iron Age. The character of the site is hard to define, since the human and animal burials, though evidently deposited as part of an elaborate ritual process, do not conform to any regular form of inhumation, which in any event was alien to later Bronze Age practice when cremation was the prevailing norm. The later Bronze Age and Iron Age activities focused on three sub-circular enclosures and an irregular 'mortuary feature', overlying the eroded and truncated remains of at least six earlier Bronze Age barrows. A series of intersecting pits within the mortuary feature contained human and animal burials, both complete and disarticulated, dating from the Late Bronze Age into the middle Iron Age. There was some spatial shift within the mortuary feature from the concentration of Late Bronze Age burials at its north-east end to the early and middle Iron Age remains in the centre and south-west of the area, and there was perhaps a greater tendency for the Late Bronze Age deposits to be 'choreographed'. This was especially evident in pit 3666 in the apparent manipulation of the human and animal skeletal remains (Fig. 7.7). An elderly woman had apparently been killed by sword cuts to the head and buried in a crouched posture with her right arm outstretched with index finger seeming to point south-west to the central enclosure. She had been laid on two neonatal lambs and had two further lambs by her side. Two children, together with a teenage girl whose head was resting on the head and neck of a cow, and the remains of an adult male, not all necessarily contemporary deposits, made up the accompanying group of human burials. Various artefactual associations were evidently integral to the assemblage, though hardly grave-goods in the accepted sense. The dead from Cliffs End Farm were considered 'non-normative' demographically, in that there were marginally more female burials than male but a notable predominance of teenagers among the sub-adults. What stood out, however, was the variety of mortuary rites,



Fig. 7.7 Cliffs End Farm, Pegwell Bay, Kent, burial pit 3666. Photograph copyright Wessex Archaeology.

communal and individual graves; human and probably animal sacrifice; excarnation with manipulation and partially articulated body parts, and curation of individual skeletal elements; exposure with subsequent canid and possibly avian scavenging of remains, and bleaching or charring of some body parts and skeletal elements.

(McKinley et al., 2013: 169)

An added dimension was afforded by oxygen and strontium isotope analysis of dental material showing that among a majority of the native population were incomers from southern Scandinavia and from the western Mediterranean. But the enigmatic burial rituals at Cliffs End Farm suggest that the complexity and diversity of Iron Age burial practices had their origins in earlier periods.

## BOG BURIALS

The debate over the interpretation of bog bodies has largely polarized between those who regard them as sacrificial victims in Iron Age ritual practices and those who see them as the executed bodies of criminals, malefactors, or others who had offended against social taboos. Since P. V. Glob's important studies (1965, 1969) Danish archaeologists have tended to stick with his view of bog bodies as sacrifices, while German archaeologists have entertained various options including the idea that social undesirables were deposited in remote bogs to deter them from troubling the community after death as *Wiedergänger*. Occasionally, as in the case of the burial of adult female and infant from Derrymaquirk, Co. Roscommon (O'Floinn, 1995), bodies were evidently placed in a formal grave in the peat, and, given the diversity of burial practices in the British Iron Age, we should perhaps not discount the possibility that disposal in bogs, lakes, rivers, or the sea might have been another option as the final act in the funerary process. In some instances, like the Windeby 'Girl' (now thought possibly to be a teenage boy) and Windeby Man from Schleswig-Holstein, the body appears to have been buried in a pit, and in the latter case, stakes were used to keep the body in position (van der Sanden 1996: fig. 130). But more commonly in Denmark burials were simply found in peat cuttings, as in the classic cases of Tollund Man and Grauballe Man. The posture of Tollund Man, contracted on his right side and with his eyes closed in a superficial appearance of tranquillity, certainly suggests that he was laid to rest with care, belying the violence of his actual demise.

Bog burials are normally individual, though a double burial, both of headless bodies originally identified as a man and a woman but apparently of two adult males, was uncovered in the early twentieth century at Weerdinge in the province of Drenthe in Holland. Sometimes two or three bog bodies have been found within the same vicinity, including Tollund Fen, Borremose, and Lindow Moss in Cheshire (Stead et al., 1986). Separated heads have also been found, as at Worsley Moss near Manchester (Garland, 1995), some doubtless the result of decapitation rather than damage in the course of retrieval. Several have shaven or cropped hair, possibly a sign of disgrace and humiliation. Yde

Girl from Drenthe and Windeby 'Girl' from Schleswig-Holstein both had half of their heads shaven, whilst Tollund Man beneath his leather cap had very short, cropped hair. A second characteristic is that a number of bog burials were recovered naked, or wearing very limited clothing. Tollund Man was naked apart from his sheepskin cap and a belt of hide. Grauballe Man (now redated from the Roman Iron Age to c.400–200 BC and thus broadly contemporary with Tollund Man) and the Weerdinge Men were naked, while Lindow Man had only a fox-fur armband. Borremose Woman had cloth garments covering the lower part of her body only. Kayhausen Boy from Lower Saxony was naked except for the textile strips with which he was trussed up. As van der Sanden (1996) pointed out, however, peat preserves textiles and leather, but is utterly destructive of vegetable fibres, so that linen clothing, for example, would not survive. This could be a significant factor, given Tacitus' observation (*Germania* 17) that women wore undergarments of linen, and it is possible that sacrificial victims were clad in special clothing for execution. Recent microscopic analysis of Tollund Man has suggested the presence of particles of fabric adhering to the skin. None of the bog bodies was tattooed, but there is a possibility that the Lindow bodies may have been painted with a clay-based blue or green copper paint (van der Sanden 1996: 143, 2012: 407).

Perhaps the most remarkable aspect about the bog bodies of Britain and northern Europe, however, is that a high proportion suffered an extreme level of physical violence that was more than sufficient to kill them. Lindow Man was garrotted, but he also had his throat cut and he suffered a heavy blow to the head, while a rib was also broken by a blow from behind. Worsley Man had been garrotted too and had blows to the skull before being beheaded after death. The rope that was used to hang Tollund Man was still looped around his neck, which bore its marks around the throat. Otherwise no other wounds were visible, other than those inflicted by the peat-cutters' spades. Elling Woman from Denmark was also hanged with a leather belt that left a deep scar around her throat. Borremose Man had been strangled with a rope of plaited hemp that was found around his neck. Yde Girl likewise had been strangled with a knotted textile band. Grauballe Man had his throat cut from ear to ear, but at the same time had suffered a blow to the temple that had fractured his skull. Stabbing as a cause of death is more difficult to distinguish from possible injuries inflicted by peat spades, but one of the Weerdinge men, Yde Girl, and Kayhausen Boy all most probably died from stab wounds. Finally it is unclear whether any of the victims actually was drowned, or why otherwise wetlands were chosen for their gruesome demise. The motive for the extreme violence displayed by some bog bodies is unclear, since these seem to be pre-meditated executions rather than spur-of-the-moment events, so that either the executioners were unduly zealous or the multiple wounds could reflect communal involvement in the act of execution. Adherents of the view that bog bodies were primarily sacrificial victims emphasize the importance of watery places as

sacred venues in later prehistory and invoke the concept of the 'triple death' as one that has analogies in early Irish and Welsh literary tradition.

Early commentators on the bog burials of northern Europe naturally turned for corroboration of their purpose to Tacitus' passage describing the administration of justice among the Germans:

Proditores et transfugas arboribus suspendunt, ignavos et imbelles et corpore infames caeno ac palude, iniecta insuper crate, mergunt. Diversitas supplicii illuc respicit, tamquam scelera ostendi oporteat, dum puniuntur, flagitia abscondi

Traitors and deserters are hanged from trees, cowards and those not prepared to fight, and those guilty of unnatural acts, are drowned in mud and swamp, with hurdles thrown on top. The difference in punishment is with this in view, that whereas it is proper to expose crimes publicly, provided they are punished, scandal should be concealed.

(Tacitus, *Germania*, 12)

It should be noted that Tacitus appears to be primarily concerned not with crimes of violence such as murder or theft of property but with transgressions against the social code. But he is not suggesting anything other than judicial punishment. There are, of course, other references in the classical sources to human sacrifice for ritual purposes, notably Diodorus (V, 31–2), Strabo (IV, IV, 5), and Caesar (*DBG*, VI, 16), all apparently drawing on Posidonius (Tierney, 1960). These repeat reports of divination from the entrails of stabbed victims, of impaling and burning of human sacrifices, but none of these activities is specifically associated with bogs or watery sanctuaries.

The case for regarding many of the hoards of metalwork and other material from watery locations as ritual deposits may be persuasive (Fitzpatrick, 1984), but it is not self-evident that bog bodies belong to the same tradition. Relatively few are associated with other artefacts, and those that were tend to be personal items like the bone comb, needle, and beads with the Huldremose woman from Denmark. Deposits like the assemblage from Rappendam in Zealand, comprising wheel and wagon fragments with the skeleton of a man and several animal remains, and the grander Dejbjerg vehicles, doubtless were ritual deposits, and prompted Glob (1969) to invoke Tacitus' (*Germania*, 40) account of the ritual vehicle of the goddess Nerthus and the drowning of her attendant slaves.

Much has been made of the stomach contents of bog bodies, predicated on the assumption that this might reveal evidence of the last ritual meal of sacrificial victims. Lindow Man was reckoned to have eaten unleavened bread or griddle cake made of cereal bran and chaff, while his intestines contained mistletoe pollen that was thought to be the result of ritual activities. Tollund Man's last meal was likewise made of cereals and weeds, possibly in the form of a thin gruel, and much the same basic contents characterized the final diets of Grauballe Man and Borremose Man, in all cases the evidence for meat being virtually non-existent. The significance of

this simple diet remains unclear. If the victims were criminals, prisoners, or social outcasts perhaps they were not considered worthy of anything better; if they were destined for sacrifice, perhaps some arcane rites dictated the permitted meals. Whatever was the status of the individuals it seems likely that the act of execution and deposition in the bog would have followed established conventions and rituals.

A novel interpretation was put forward by Kelly (2006) for the Irish bog bodies, among which two examples from Clonycavan, Co. Meath, and Old Croghan, Co. Offaly, found in 2003, were both dated around 300 BC. Kelly linked these finds, together with deposits of wagon remains and other artefacts, to inauguration ceremonies on territorial boundaries, particularly of medieval baronies that he believed had a much older ancestry. The bog sacrifices and burials would thus have been part of the ritual inauguration of kings. Intriguing as this possibility might be, the mere fact of deposition in a bog or wetland context does not require a single explanation for all burials, any more than would be true of burials on dry land, so that the umbrella category of bog burials almost certainly includes a variety of different explanations.

## Gender issues

Contemporary studies commonly stress the belief that, even if sex is biologically determined, gender by contrast is a social and cultural construct (Sofaer and Sørensen, 2012). Even biological sex entails varying degrees of male and female attributes in terms of chromosomes and DNA if not in terms of reproductive organs, so that, contrary to the bipolar model of sex, contemporary studies of gender tend to think in terms of a spectrum that includes composite gender or a third gender that is neither male nor female in what Arnold (2006: 155) described as ‘a suprabinary gender system’. In the case of the Byzantine eunuchs or the Indian *hijra* cited by Croucher (2012: 174–5), these could be regarded as socially constructed, and it is not here suggested that such categories existed in Iron Age Britain or Europe. It is important, however, to be clear that conventional western sexual stereotypes and conceptions of gender roles in child-rearing, food production, and warfare, for example, need not have pertained in non-classical societies in antiquity.

Gender issues in the study of funerary archaeology have gained a prominence in the last twenty years not simply as a result of theoretical considerations but also because of more intensive interest in osteological research, as a result of which there has been a greater recognition of the fact that identifying sex may involve evaluation of a spectrum of criteria rather than simple bipolar options. Though pelvic bones remain crucial to assessing sex, the skull and other major bones can also be indicative, and not infrequently the evidence remains equivocal, even where the skeleton is reasonably well preserved. Accordingly, some of the skeletons from the eastern Yorkshire cemeteries were deemed to show ‘contra’ indications, that is male and female characteristics in equal measure, in a gradation of assessment that also included ‘definite’, ‘probable’, and ‘possible’ identifications (Stead, 1991). Furthermore, though sex is biologically determined, osteology may be affected by cultural factors such as the degree of physical exercise that the individual habitually engages in, so that the criteria observed by the osteologist may suggest a physique normally associated with the opposite sex.



## STRUCTURE AND LAYOUT OF CEMETERIES

A first issue that should be considered is whether there is any evidence in the Iron Age of gender discrimination in the proportion of the male and female population that was accorded burial in cemeteries, and a second and consequent consideration is whether there is evidence of discrimination in the manner and form of burial or spatial segregation of graves in cemeteries. Giles has shown that in eastern Yorkshire, the only region in Britain where the evidence of Iron Age inhumation cemeteries is sufficient to make statistical assessments, and within the limitations of identification, female burials constitute the majority in most cemeteries, at Wetwang Slack comprising 59 per cent of the total and at Garton Slack an even more striking 64 per cent (though King's (2010) figures show a lower majority for Wetwang Slack), raising a question whether this genuinely reflected the demographic balance, or whether access to cemetery burial was restricted or selective. One possibility was that this might reflect the practice of polygamy (Giles, 2012: 99–100), though there does not appear to be any clear evidence of this in terms of proximal groupings.

In the European Iron Age generally, discrimination or segregation on the basis of sex or gender is not widely documented in the archaeological record. It has been observed that in Iron Age cemeteries in north Germany and Jutland there is evidence for segregation of sexes into discrete spatial groups or even into separate cemeteries (Parker Pearson, 1999a: 12). Recognizing gender on the basis of osteological remains has only been applicable in limited circumstances in northern Jutland, the Danish islands, and north Germany, but for the late first century BC and early first century AD 'most cemeteries exhibit very definite spatial differentiation according to gender-associated artefacts' (Parker Pearson, 1993, 218). Though some artefact types that have traditionally been regarded as indicative of female graves, such as brooches, pins, needles, and beads, may also occur in male graves, nevertheless the osteological analyses of Breitsprecher (1987) broadly endorsed the significance of gender associations of artefacts in the Danish pre-Roman and early Roman Iron Age, though Parker Pearson regarded these as 'significant trends' rather than 'absolute differences'. In northern Germany Capelle (1971) had identified separate cemeteries dedicated to male and female graves, and similar distinctions can be suggested for southern Jutland until the second century, though not in elite inhumation groups (Parker Pearson, 1993: 219).

In north-western Europe a measure of spatial segregation between male and female graves has been argued for phase 1 of the late Hallstatt cemetery at Les Jogasses, Chouilly, Marne (Favret, 1936), and for the contemporary cemetery at Chervais at Heiltz-l'Évêque (Demoule, 1999: tables 7.3 and 7.4), also in the Marne, though with concentric expansion of the elliptical core layout the pattern of segregation between graves with ornaments and graves with weapons, accepted as proxies for female and male graves respectively, becomes less

apparent. Examination of more than 500 graves from 28 cemeteries and burial sites of the fifth and fourth centuries from the Champagne region, exposed by rescue excavations, from which a significant proportion was subject to osteological examination, broadly endorsed the conventional association of key artefact types with male and female graves (Bonnabel et al., 2011), but did not reveal distinctive spatial groupings in consequence. Meat offerings showed some evidence for different conventions, a preponderance of pig, notably the foreparts, being found in male graves, and sheep being favoured in female burials, with beef occurring only in female graves. On the other hand, the somewhat dispersed graves at 'Le Puisard', Caurel (Marne), dating to La Tène ancienne, may have been grouped by sex, insofar as limited numbers permitted generalization (ibid. fig. 3), rather than by familial association. In general there were only minor and localized differences in grave structure and layout in Champagne that could be attributed to gender differences. Olivier claimed (2000), however, that the early Iron Age 'Bois de Voivre' cemetery at Haroué (Meurthe-et-Moselle) (Beaupré and Voinot, 1903), where an estimated three-quarters of the cemetery had been excavated, displayed evidence of hierarchy in terms of the size of the tumulus mounds, in which male inhumations with weapons were pre-eminent, with adult male and female inhumations without weapons occupying a subordinate position above child burials and with cremation burials having the smallest of the burial mounds. This hierarchy was also in some measure reflected in the spatial organization of the cemetery, with female burials clustered around the predominant male burials and weapon burials, with children's burials beyond these, and with cremations relegated to the periphery of the cemetery. He stressed, nevertheless, that this inferred hierarchy applied only to the burials in tumuli, and did not take account of those burials that had not been accorded a monumental marker. So the early La Tène cemeteries of the Champagne region may show evidence for social hierarchy or perhaps for related family groups, but not in general simple spatial divisions on the basis of gender.

Within the British Iron Age the evidence is perhaps too disparate regionally to permit an unequivocal assessment, but even in those areas like eastern Yorkshire, where formal cemeteries have been studied extensively, there is no clear evidence for segregation spatially by sex, nor indeed for the overt differentiation of male and female burials in terms of grave construction or orientation, or of the manner in which the deceased is disposed within it. In the Wetwang Slack cemetery there was no evidence for spatial segregation by sex (King, 2010: 173), nor in fact was there any discernible differentiation between the sexes in terms of artefact associations, either by type or in numbers. The small early group of burials at Melton in south Yorkshire (Fig. 3.9) has been claimed as predominantly female (Pope and Ralston, 2011: 390), though the published record (Fenton-Thomas, 2011) hardly seems to bear this out. Two adults were certainly or probably female, and,

together with the infants and juveniles that completed the group, were all buried in simple pit graves. Two male burials by contrast somewhat improbably appeared not only to have intruded on earlier Bronze Age burials but to have adopted similar use of a timber coffin to Beaker burials. The burials were all flexed or crouched inhumations with head oriented to the north, as observed commonly elsewhere, but the group was somewhat scattered and with just seven graves in total hardly affords a statistically reliable sample to demonstrate segregation. All seemed to have suffered dietary deficiencies or diseases that might nevertheless indicate a closely related group. On the other hand, the small cemetery recently uncovered on the outskirts of Salisbury (Powell, 2013), 200 metres outside the Iron Age enclosed settlement at Little Woodbury (Bersu, 1940), but on the basis of radiocarbon dating apparently slightly earlier than that site's middle Iron Age heyday, comprised just nine inhumations, seven of which were female, with one of two males a sub-adult, a distribution that clearly cannot have been representative of the community and must therefore have been subject to some form of selectivity. The graves were quite widely spaced, which may be one reason why cemeteries of the period are not readily identified, but of the six that were buried in pairs, all were female. Worth noting in this context are the three female burials within the hillfort at Broxmouth (Armit et al., 2013), two of which were significantly earlier than the external cemetery and could have been foundation burials or human sacrifices linked to the earlier phases of occupation. The third, contemporary with the cemetery and the height of the site's pre-Roman Iron Age occupation, was accorded a cist-grave in a prominent position in the south-west entrance.

## ROLE AND STATUS

The older conventional way of distinguishing gender differences in burials in lieu of definitive osteological evidence was in terms of associated grave-goods. We have already addressed the potential shortcomings of assuming that grave-goods are indicative of the role or status of the deceased, however, and this is nowhere more apparent than in the assumption that grave-goods are indicative of the sex of the deceased. In principle, having established sex independently on the basis of osteology, it may be possible archaeologically to demonstrate that a given class of artefact was more commonly associated with male or female burials, or perhaps that the same artefacts were treated differently in male and female graves. What are simply not admissible are assumptions, based upon anachronistic gender stereotypes derived from later western classical tradition (Pope, 2007: 207–8), that, for example, weapons equate to male graves and personal ornaments indicate female graves, a misconception that has bedevilled

archaeological interpretation for far too long. This is not to say that weapons may not be characteristic of male graves and personal ornaments of female graves, merely that this need not be diagnostic and must be demonstrated rather than being a default presumption.

It has also been stressed that what generally survive archaeologically are the mute remains in the final stage of burial that may have spoken volumes in their role in earlier stages of the funeral. Dress accessories, for example, were 'meant to be worn, and they were often affected by regulation about how and when they were worn' (Sørensen, 2006: 120). It seems probable that such accessories were especially significant in the laying out of the dead, but it does not follow that they were all deposited in the grave, or would have survived if they had been. Flowers, for example, have many different meanings from birth to death, but few rites of passage are complete without them.

A second issue relates to female burials and status, and more especially the inference that female burials with a range of prestigious grave-goods might signify that women could have held political rank and authority equal to that which might be inferred for men. The documented instances of Cartimandua and Boudicca, or perhaps more pertinently Boudicca's daughters, whom Prasutagus had nominated as his heirs, would certainly suggest that women in Iron Age society were not excluded from holding high rank or inheriting property or title. Both individuals admittedly were products of the politically turbulent decades following the conquest, but there really is no evidence to suggest that the social structure of Iron Age Britain had changed so fundamentally in the century before the conquest that women could not have exercised similar roles and authority in earlier times. Yet it must be acknowledged that none of the dynastic coins of Britain or Gaul actually bears the recognizable head or name of a female ruler, and at no stage in the Gallic campaign did Caesar ever record encountering one. Furthermore, when Cunobelinus wished to reinforce his credentials for inheritance, he proclaimed himself to be the son of Tasciovanus, suggesting a patrilineal order of descent, though this, of course, need not preclude a woman being the inheritor.

The archaeological evidence for women being accorded a prestigious role in death is testified amply by female burials like that of the late Hallstatt Vix 'princess' (Joffroy, 1954; Rolley, 2003). By any standard Vix is exceptional for its massive crater, but it is hard to understand, if extravagant assemblages in male graves are seen as evidence of royal status, why comparable assemblages for women should require the added explanation of a combined role as priestess (Knüsel, 2002; Milcent, 2003). In fact for central Gaul, Milcent (2004: 209–11) argued that the pre-eminence of female assemblages in both graves and votive deposits in the Hallstatt D1–2 phase, broadly contemporary with Vix, argued for a system of descent through the female line, citing Livy's (*History*, V. 34) observation that Ambigatus of the Bituriges nominated his *sister's* sons, Bellovesus and Segovesus, to lead the migration into Italy. In the

ensuing La Tène Iron Age, Reinheim (Keller, 1965; Echt, 1999) stands out as a further instance of a high-status female grave, and others may be suspected among the Hunsrück-Eifel series where the skeletal evidence from older discoveries is equivocal.

In Britain the most obvious potential expression of status in burials prior to the first century BC is the chariot burial rite of eastern Yorkshire and beyond. Of around twenty such burials only three can be confidently regarded as female, the so-called Lady's Barrow at Arras, the central of the three chariot burials discovered at Wetwang Slack in 1984, and that excavated at Wetwang Village in 2001. In all three cases the associated artefacts apparently endorse the identification, notably in the absence of weaponry and the presence instead in all three of a mirror. Also in common was the deposit of joints of pig. Unlike practice in the Upper Seine (Evans, 2004: 186) the choice of meat appears not to have been based on sex, but it was clearly a significant component of the funerary ritual in eastern Yorkshire for both men and women of appropriate status.

For the late pre-Roman Iron Age in south-eastern England a major inhibition is the simple fact that cremation makes sexing extremely difficult, being based largely on an assessment of stature and robustness of build indicated by surviving bone fragments. We have already noted that, at King Harry Lane, Verulamium, Stead and Rigby (1989: 83) had identified what may reasonably be regarded as focal or founder's burials, in both enclosed and unenclosed clusters. Of those selected by Millett (1993: 261), only five could be assigned to sex, all of which were male. Fitzpatrick (1991), however, included female grave 299, which seems unquestionably focal to its compound, and female grave 93, which is rather less focal to its unenclosed cluster, and raised the question whether, notwithstanding the coin evidence, the descent system might not have been bilateral. Female grave 349 appears rather more isolated, but, if originally covered by a low mound, it too might have been focal to some of the nearest adjacent burials. Likewise at Westhampnett, subject again to the limitations of sexing cremated remains, at least one of the focal burials was female.

## ARTEFACT ASSOCIATIONS

The fundamental assumption that gender may be signalled by associated artefacts in graves must be qualified by the role of any given artefact in the grave assemblage, and its relationship to the deceased. We have earlier distinguished between grave furnishings, personal effects or dress attachments, and objects that may have been deposited by kin or dependants, of which only the second group is likely to have any direct relevance to the gender of the dead. Even then, artefacts need not be viewed solely as a passive reflection of gender

or of social status; instead they may be implicit in the construction and expression of gender (Sørensen, 2006). So, for example, swords have conventionally been regarded as a male accessory, but if found in a grave in which the skeleton is biologically female, it may signal that the individual or the individual's rank in society was regarded as having masculine attributes. Among the principal social complements of gender is dress, sometimes accompanied by particular fittings or ornaments that may have gender associations. Unfortunately, textiles or fabrics do not normally survive in most archaeological contexts, and the commonest dress attachments that do survive such as pins or brooches are generally regarded as gender neutral. So the equation of artefact types with gender is certainly not exclusive and is often ambiguous in terms of the biological sex of the deceased. In the past it was undoubtedly invoked too often and simplistically in the absence of definitive skeletal evidence of sex, which is not to say that there are not numerous examples in prehistory of artefact associations that reflect significant preferences in male and female burials.

Among the most intensively studied groups of Iron Age cemeteries in north Alpine Europe, the early La Tène cemeteries of north-eastern France display some recurrent associations that have been generally accepted as reflecting gender, though not necessarily the biological sex of the deceased. 'Masculine' artefacts include weapons, razors, and shears, while 'feminine' items include torcs and a range of personal ornaments, together with utilitarian items conventionally associated with what were thought of as women's activities such as needles and spindle whorls. In addition to these there are a considerable number of 'neutral' artefacts, notably brooches and pottery (Marion, 2004: 184). There are, of course, anomalies, such as weapon graves, including instances in chariot burials, in which the deceased is buried with a bracelet on one arm, a convention that is found more frequently in central and eastern Europe (Lorenz, 1978: 138). There is also some evidence of regional variation. In contrast to the Aisne-Marne (Demoule, 1999) and Île de France (Marion, 2004), for example, it has been argued that in Basse-Normandie torcs and bracelets both occur in male graves, though statistically still in a very small proportion of the total number of instances (Chanson et al., 2010: 75 and figs 20, 21). Inadequate osteological reporting from older excavations combined with poor skeletal preservation remains a major hindrance to the establishment of a more reliable data-set, but it seems clear that we are dealing at most with a strong tendency rather than a definitive convention. In fact, the majority of graves as recovered archaeologically are 'gender neutral' in terms of artefact associations, though assemblages may originally have included gender-specific items that were perishable, such as textiles and other elements of dress and adornment.

In Britain, as on the Continent, brooches and pins are not in general indicative of gender, and evidently served as utilitarian dress-fasteners for

both male and female clothing. Some possible preferences, however, may be indicated by the Rudston–Burton Fleming series of graves, where involuted brooches, apart from the latest variant, occurred most frequently in female graves (Stead, 1991: table 3). Bracelets likewise in the same cemeteries occurred predominantly in female burials, though the small sample and the tentative nature of some osteological identifications make this no more than a possible trend.

Pottery likewise does not appear to be indicative of gender. In the Rudston–Burton Fleming cemetery the incidence of pots in male and female graves was about equal. Stead (2006: 62) detected some evidence in the Champagne for a distinction on the basis of gender in the choice of pot types in the Tinquieux (Marne) cemetery (Flouest and Stead, 1981) and in the position relative to the body where vessels were placed at Saulces-Champenoises, though in both cases the sample was too small to regard these trends as definitive, and in the wider cemetery record there is minimal evidence of such distinctions. But in Britain there is little evidence either for the inclusion of pots as grave-goods on the basis of gender, or, among the more diverse pottery types from the later Iron Age in southern and south-eastern Britain, for any preference for certain types in male or female graves. It may nevertheless be possible that local traditions regarding the choice and placement of pots (or presumably in reality their contents) have hitherto eluded archaeological detection, and this may be a line of enquiry that warrants further investigation.

Contrary therefore to the simplistic gender attributions that were commonly made in the past on the basis of associated grave-goods, it is now widely acknowledged that ‘few items of material culture recovered from graves are . . . uniquely attributable to one or other gender’ (Pope and Ralston, 2011: 400). Among the conventional attributions of artefact types to gender, or those where recurrent associations have registered in the archaeological record, however, are several distinctive groups that deserve further consideration.

## **Weapons**

We have already considered graves with weaponry and whether they constitute a distinct category of ‘warrior burials’. Here it remains only to address the question whether there is any significant gender bias in the association of weapons in burial. Most studies of this issue have concluded, hardly surprisingly, that the majority of burials with weapons, excluding knives, both in Britain and in continental Europe, in which determination of sex has been based upon osteological evidence, have been shown to be male, but not exclusively so. This conclusion must necessarily be qualified by the fact that many older excavation reports appear to rely primarily on artefact associations rather than osteological analysis to determine sex, and in many instances do not make clear the basis of assessment. The situation is complicated by the

sometimes equivocal nature of the osteological evidence, through poor survival or ambivalent features. At Rudston, for example, twelve out of eighteen weapon burials were assessed as male or probably/possibly male, with just one as possibly female and one uncertain. But four others showed 'contra indications', which might well suggest the presence of women whose status or role in society included the bearing of arms. We should not overlook the fact that female warriors are depicted on Gaulish coins (Allen and Nash, 1980: 140; de Jersey, 1994: 54–5; Craig et al., 2005: 173–4), brandishing sword or spear in one hand and shield in the other, but these naked figures are generally interpreted as representations of deities based on classical models rather than a true reflection of Gaulish society.

### Torcs

Whilst not definitively indicative of female graves, one item in the continental earlier Iron Age that is frequently found in high-status female graves is the neck torc, most commonly in copper alloy. At Münsingen they are typically found in female graves, but also in the graves of children and juveniles, but only in the earliest phases of the cemetery's life (Hodson, 1968: 31). They may conceivably have formed part of a set, with anklets or with arm-rings. Copper alloy torcs are also frequently found in cemeteries from the Champagne, often displaying regional variations of the developed early La Tène art style (Harding, 2007: 76–8). Here too they are predominantly though not exclusively found in female graves (Evans, 2004; Stead et al., 2006: 74). They begin to appear in male graves in the upper Seine basin with greater frequency in La Tène ancienne III and La Tène moyenne (Evans, 2004: 185), but there are notable examples of torcs in burials that also include weapons, conventionally regarded as a male accompaniment, from La Tène ancienne I. In grave 25 at Vrigny in the Marne (Chossenot et al., 1981: 150), a child was accompanied by a small spear or javelin as well as a torc, together with a bracelet on the right arm, two brooches, and three pottery vases. The choice of a small spearhead is matched at Barbey, Seine-et-Marne, by a smaller than usual sword in the burial of a young male who was also given a torc (Marion, 2004: 185). A sword and torc were also found in association in a grave at Bouqueval in the same département, while in one of the graves from Les Terres du Coer at Perrogney-les-Fontaines in the Haute Marne (Balliot, 1900) the skeleton was wearing a torc around the neck and a bracelet on the left wrist, with two brooches on the chest probably as dress-fastenings, but with sword and spear flanking the lower legs. The association of weaponry and torcs is therefore not so exceptional as is sometimes implied. Their presence in the graves of children or young adolescents who can hardly have established their own reputation as warriors, however, perhaps argues in favour of the symbolic character of these associations.



In continental Europe neck-rings and torcs in gold have a longer and more complex history as grave-goods, being found in cemeteries particularly in the earlier La Tène phase. Torcs in twisted bar or ribbon form have their origins in the Bronze Age, mostly from hoards, and by the early La Tène period gold neck-rings are certainly known from grave contexts, including some of the most elaborate like those from the Glauberg in Hesse, Reinheim in the Saar, and Waldalgesheim in the middle Rhine, all of which were highly prestigious burials. In many cases the neck-ring in continental burials is actually round the neck of the skeleton, so that, like arm-rings and anklets, they clearly signify something in respect to the individual interred, as opposed to being an offering to the otherworld or simply an accompaniment of the funerary rite.

In Britain, by contrast, torcs are almost invariably from hoards and are hardly ever found in graves, including high-status graves of the latest pre-Roman Iron Age that otherwise include a range of other grave-goods, though often, as we have noted, not of a personal character. One relatively recent find of a middle Iron Age pit burial from Brackmills, Northamptonshire (Chapman, 1998), hardly affects this assessment, since the neck-ring that adorned the mature female was of lead, and clearly not in the same category as the twisted wire or bar torcs made of gold, electrum, or silver. Like continental burials, however, the torc in this instance was around the neck of the crouched inhumation. On the other hand, the torc that was reportedly found with the warrior with horses in a grave at Mildenhall (Bunbury, 1834) was of gold, leading to its melting down shortly after discovery, and therefore stands out as an exception.

The very special role accorded to torcs in Iron Age society is further attested by their depiction in sculpture, as in the carved head from Mšecké Žehrovice in Bohemia, in some cases combined with putatively religious symbolism, as in the Euffigneix statue from the Haute-Marne with its boar image, or in its several representations on the panels of the Gundestrup cauldron from Jutland. These examples might be taken to indicate that the neck-ring or torc was a symbol of divinity, the figures depicted being gods or heroes. Their inclusion in graves, therefore, on a recurrent basis, if only for a relatively short period, and particularly in predominantly female graves, must invest these burials with special status, or otherwise indicate a measure of exclusivity in these cemeteries.

As a symbol of divinity, torcs may also have had protective associations, as is implied by classical sources, notably Polybius' (*Histories*: 2.29) description of Celtic warriors, naked except for their torcs and armlets, fighting at the battle of Telamon in 225 BC, which suggests that these artefacts were believed to have talismanic qualities. This likewise is the image of the Celtic warrior in the Pergamon sculpture of the Dying Gaul. Rather later in a British context Cassius Dio's (*Historia Romana*: 62.2.4) account of Boudicca wearing a massive torc of gold when she rallied her troops to rebellion suggests that it was a token of regal rank, again perhaps intended to invoke divine support or protection.

Several questions thus arise regarding neck-rings and torcs in the context of burials. There is plainly considerable variation in the broad class of neck ornament, in the material of manufacture, and in the extent of ornament, so that generalization could easily be misleading. The evidence of continental cemeteries suggests that neck-rings and torcs are regularly found in female burials, including some of the wealthiest, though it evidently was a selective custom both regionally and chronologically. In Britain by contrast it is remarkable that neck-rings are completely absent from burials, even from the eastern Yorkshire cemeteries that otherwise show distinct elements in common with their continental earlier La Tène counterparts. Balancing this is the classical perception that torcs were worn by male warriors in battle. A critical factor doubtless is the late occurrence of torcs in Britain from any context. Taking into account non-funerary deposits, torcs in Britain and Ireland generally date from the first century BC, with the exception of notable imports like the 'Plastic Style' fragments from Blair Drummond in Perthshire or the La Tène B2 buffer torc from Knock, Co. Roscommon. Yet still they are not found in burials, of which there are sufficient wealthy examples of the late pre-Roman Iron Age in south-eastern England to have witnessed their inclusion had that been the custom.

### Beaded necklaces

Beads, generally of glass, but occasionally of amber or other materials, in British Iron Age graves for the most part occur as odd remnants of broken up or dispersed necklaces. Wetwang Slack (Dent, 1982: fig. 7) is therefore a notable exception in having no less than ten graves in which beads occurred in sufficient numbers to have been part of a necklace that would have formed a credible counterpart to a torc. These groups were mainly composed of plain blue glass, though several included a minority of other types of bead, prompting the idea that these may have had some significance in terms of social relationships or inherited treasures. Giles (2012: table 5.3) has shown that these all came from female graves, predominantly of women in the mature adult category. Three of the Wetwang Slack burials, WS 274, WS 236, and WS 249, were of particular interest, in that they were intersected by later square-ditch barrows, which themselves in turn were cut by yet later burials. The implication therefore is that these burials could have been 'focal', attracting later inhumations that were deliberately sited to be in proximal contact with them, in effect that they were of 'matriarchal figures . . . whose graves formed a focus for their descendants' (ibid. 79). It seems entirely reasonable to regard these grave-goods as indicative of women who were highly ranked or regarded. What is perhaps surprising is that, apart from Cowlam and the Queen's Barrow at Arras, the custom does not appear to have registered elsewhere.

Had beads been more prolific in graves elsewhere, necklaces might have been regarded as symbols of status and an insular alternative to the torc.

### **Mirror burials**

Of all artefact types from British Iron Age graves, the archaeological evidence for associating mirrors with female burials on balance is still persuasive, within the limitations of the available data. First of all, the majority of mirror burials from south-eastern England are cremations, from the remains of which it is plainly difficult to determine sex. Second, many of the inhumation burials with mirrors from a wider area were old discoveries from which the sex of the individual was not reliably determined from skeletal examination, but inferred on the basis of the associated grave-goods. In other instances, such as the more recent find from Bryher, the poor state of preservation of the bone precluded definitive identification. Of the earlier group of five undecorated iron mirrors from eastern Yorkshire, the sex of the skeletons was reliably determined as female for the three modern finds, from Garton Slack, Wetwang Slack, and Wetwang Village.

In terms of both typology and chronology a distinction needs to be drawn between the earlier and later mirrors. The Yorkshire mirrors are generally smaller, their plates are of iron and undecorated, their handles are of straight, bar form and longer, and they must date essentially from the fourth and third centuries BC. The later series, comprising principally the south-eastern and south-western regional groups, date from the first century BC into the first century AD. They are made of bronze and are generally larger, with one side of their plates plain and the other decorated with balanced curvilinear designs in the insular late La Tène style, but with composition and motifs that are distinctive of the mirror series (Harding, 2007). Though Joy's (2010: 6) argument against the notion that mirrors could have been invented twice in Britain carries obvious force, bridging the gap between the two on current evidence is not easy. It depends upon the assumption that mirrors continued in use and developed typologically through the second half of the first millennium BC, the true picture being distorted by their limited survival in the highly uneven funerary record. In terms of the social significance of mirrors, it could of course be argued that typology, technology of construction and ornament or lack of it, and chronology have little bearing upon the role of mirrors in life or their significance in funerary ritual. But glossing over these differences could obscure important changes in the role of mirrors in Britain, which may have developed from being exotic, high-status accessories to having a more significant role in ceremonial and ritual activities.

The problem of origins and inspiration for British Iron Age mirrors is compounded by the paucity of mirrors in non-Mediterranean Europe. Greek

and Etruscan societies, and later Roman, all had mirrors, which are regularly depicted as female accessories. Three mirrors from north Alpine Europe are regularly cited as possibly influenced by Greek mirrors, one from the fourth-century 'princess's burial' at Reinheim in the Saar (Keller, 1965; Echt, 1999), the others older finds from Courcelles-en-Montagne in the Marne (Jacobsthal, 1944: no. 374) and Hochheim-am-Main (ibid. no. 373). At Courcelles a cremation with sword, accompanied by imported Etruscan *stamnos* and Attic *kantharos*, dates to the fifth century; the accompanying inhumation with the mirror may have been slightly later. This is a period when Etruscan goods were beginning to penetrate extensively into the Champagne, middle Rhine, and regions further east, though mirrors were not at this time among the imported types, which were almost exclusively those related to feasting and drinking. The Reinheim mirror is notable for its anthropomorphic handle, a feature that it shares with Hochheim, and one that may well derive from one group of Greek mirrors. The Reinheim figure also wears a leaf-crown, regarded by Jacobsthal as a symbol of divinity. Other less tangible Greek and Graeco-Etruscan influences at this time included artistic motifs and themes that were adopted and adapted by the makers of high-status La Tène metal-work, and it seems probable that, through long-distance trade and exchange networks, fashions and ideas may have been spread much further than the artefacts themselves. If the idea of mirrors was introduced into Britain, the products themselves are nevertheless of entirely insular manufacture, and like brooches showed both the capacity of insular craftsmen for innovation and in the later series their artistic flair.

The sex of the Reinheim burial was inferred from the associated grave-goods, since the acid soil conditions had totally destroyed any skeletal remains. The magnificent gold torc is hardly definitive, however, since, as we have seen, the gender associations of torcs archaeologically and in sculptural representation and in classical sources is equivocal. The Reinheim assemblage nevertheless included a suite of elaborate personal ornaments, and more definitively for German archaeologists, lacked weaponry. At Courcelles the sex of the inhumation appears to have been inferred from the associated grave-goods. In addition to the mirror, the deceased wore an anklet, a type that is regarded conventionally as an exclusively female embellishment.

Among the eastern Yorkshire series of early mirrors, three of the five were from chariot burials, those from Wetwang Slack, Wetwang Village, and the 'Lady's Barrow' from Arras. In view of the fact that these signal burials contain relatively few grave-goods apart from the vehicle fittings and horse harness, the presence of a mirror must be regarded as special, and has frequently been regarded as the female counterpart in indicating high status to a sword or weapon assemblage in demonstrably or putatively male graves. Mirrors are sufficiently rare and distinctive to suggest that they signal something special about the grave, but the fact that mirror graves do not necessarily contain an

abundance of other ornaments might suggest that they do not simply signal femininity. The cylindrical bronze can from Wetwang Slack is unique, and adds to the special character of the burial, but again, whilst it could have been used to contain personal trinkets or the like, it is not self-evidently an item of feminine use. The Wetwang Village burial certainly produced blue glass beads, but seemingly as an attachment to the mirror, in the way that the later mirror from Portesham had a brooch pinned through the loop of its handle. Nevertheless, as we have seen, of the three Wetwang Slack chariot burials, the mirror grave is not only central in the alignment, but is also in terms of its barrow ditch enclosure the largest of the three, and therefore has the appearance of a focal burial.

The Garton Slack mirror burial was also in a small aligned group, but was not a chariot burial, and had no other grave-goods apart from the mirror. Brewster's (1980: 228) description of the deceased was hardly flattering: she was a robust woman between 25 and 30 years of age, with a 'high vaulted brow, long narrow face, and a pointed chin, narrow eyes and a broad prominent nose'. She was flexed on her right side facing east, with her head possibly resting on a chalk block as a pillow stone. Two suckling pigs had been included in the grave, and a chalk slab could possibly have been the headless remnant of a figurine, as known elsewhere in the Arras culture cemeteries (Stead, 1988). The paucity or lack of other grave-goods, however, perhaps lends enhanced significance to the mirror, which again evidently was not just one of a suite of personal ornaments and cosmetic accessories.

The distribution of later pre-Roman Iron Age mirrors in southern Britain may be broadly divided into a south-eastern group, associated with cremation burials, mainly north of the Thames in territories conventionally identified with the historical Catuvellauni and Trinovantes, and a more westerly group, in regions attributed to the Dobunni and Durotriges westward to Cornwall and the Scillies, where inhumation was the norm, though with variations in local rites. Reliable attribution to sex, as we have noted, is hampered by the difficulty of dating cremated remains, or by the conditions or circumstances of recovery of skeletal evidence. The later mirror burials were often more lavishly equipped, so that identification to sex has commonly relied upon these associations rather than definitive osteological evidence. Several key examples, like Birdlip, were old finds (Bellows, 1881) and the records are not entirely clear or consistent. Bellows recorded the discovery in 1879 by the local quarryman of three extended inhumations in a line, though whether in one cist, perhaps originally under a barrow, or in three separate cists, as seems more likely, is unclear. The well-furnished central burial with the mirror, confirmed as that of a woman (Staelens, 1982: 21), was apparently flanked by two male graves without grave-goods, in a manner reminiscent of Wetwang Slack. The associated assemblage included notably two bronze bowls, one large, one small, a bronze bracelet and four smaller bronze rings, a small cast bronze handle with horned animal-head terminal, a bead necklace, and a silver gilt

brooch of La Tène 3 type of late pre-Roman date. The group essentially comprises personal or dress ornaments and high-quality domestic utensils.

A similar inventory accompanied the probable female burial from Portesham (Fitzpatrick, 1996), with the addition of characteristic Durotrigan funerary pottery. The grave, which had been damaged by a metal detectorist, was a simple, sub-rectangular pit rather than a cist, in which the crouched inhumation had been placed in an east–west alignment in keeping with Durotrigan preference. The burial dates to shortly after the conquest, as was indicated by associated grave-goods of Roman type, including a bronze pan of a type usually associated with a wine strainer, though the mirror was undoubtedly old when buried. Two brooches at the shoulders of the deceased were doubtless dress or shroud fastenings. Offerings of food and drink were provided by joints of pig and sheep, together with a pottery bowl at the heels of the dead, while a second bowl had been placed behind her back. At her waist, perhaps suspended from a belt, was a toilet set comprising tweezers and ear-scoop, with a knife and the mirror with another brooch looped through its handle. The presence of the toilet set is instructive, since it suggests that the conventional interpretation of these later pre-Roman Iron Age mirrors as personal dressing accessories is still a plausible explanation, which is not to suggest that their use was mere vanity. Dressing has a special significance for major events such as weddings, inauguration to high office and funerals, and doubtless there would have been other festive occasions, perhaps involving body painting, for example, in which a mirror would have been an asset to the elite participants. As Izzet (2007) has argued in the context of Etruscan mirrors, their presence may signal an increasing awareness in later Iron Age communities of the importance of personal and gender identity, which may have led to greater emphasis on symbolic adornment in both women and men.

A pair of tweezers was also one item among the grave-goods in a mirror burial recently uncovered just south of Portesham overlooking the Chesil Beach (Craig-Atkins et al., 2013). Here a young adult woman, who evidently suffered from a chronic respiratory disease, was accompanied by a fine copper alloy mirror decorated in the south-western style, with a selection of beads, Langton Down and thistle brooches, a bracelet, and a Roman Republican *denarius* that was evidently old when deposited in the grave at some time around the conquest.

The mirror burial from Bryher on the Isles of Scilly poses a particular problem of artefact association, being unique in having mirror and sword as accompaniments in the same grave. The only possible parallel is from Lambay Island, Co. Dublin, where several crouched inhumations were exposed by harbour constructions in 1927 and destroyed before they could be properly recorded. From one ‘shield, sword and ornaments’ were reported on the estate map as being covered by an ‘iron plate’, presumed to be the mirror (Rynne, 1976), but the association is far from assured. What the ornaments consisted

of is equally unclear. A decorative plaque could have been part of the shield embellishment, but otherwise the only ornaments were rings and brooches. The mirror was certainly not of the later decorated bronze variety, hence Rynne's citing of Yorkshire parallels, which would make it an heirloom by the time the dolphin, Langton Down, and thistle brooches were in circulation. In the case of the Bryher burial, because of the association of mirror with sword, it is particularly vexing that poor bone preservation in acidic soil conditions precluded determination of the sex of the deceased. It should be pointed out nevertheless that in Iron Age Eurasia the association of mirrors with weapons is by no means uncommon (Moyer, 2012), so that we should certainly not make any presupposition of incompatibility in the British Iron Age, which arises only because grave-goods are still too frequently assumed to be possessions of the dead and indicative therefore of their role in life. Weapons and mirrors may indeed have been objects that conferred special status upon their owners or custodians, contributing pro-actively to their persona rather than reflecting passively their gender and status, but equally they may have had special significance in the funerary ritual that transcended any gender associations that these artefacts may have had in life.

The Bryher mirror was found in a Porth Cressa type boulder cist. Other south-western mirrors from cist-burials include Trelan Bahow, Stamford Hill, and the Verne, Portland, and, as we have seen, Birdlip, but they are not restricted to cist-burials in the Durotrigan area, as Portesham showed. The only complete mirror recovered from a settlement context was the Holcombe example (Fox and Pollard, 1973; but note in Johns, 2003: 69). What does unite these south-western mirrors is the style of ornament on their backs, which characteristically uses a range of motifs, including crescents with radial hatching and *peltae*, with three-stroked basketry hatching at right angles in alternate squares (Harding, 2007: 159–63). These motifs almost certainly had a symbolic significance beyond mere ornamentation, which would be consistent with the mirrors' use in divination or similar ritual practices.

Of the south-eastern mirror burials one of the earliest is that found at Chilham Castle in Kent (Parfitt, 1998) with the cremated remains of a young adult, probably female, which in this instance were contained in the solitary cinerary vessel. The mirror was decorated with a typical composition of three roundel elements, but executed in a simple, somewhat crude and asymmetric design with hatched infilling, but with none of the basketry hatched motifs that lend mirror ornament its distinctive effect of interplay between foreground and background. With the mirror were two La Tène 3 brooches, which Stead identified as *Knotenfibel*-derived variants of the Nauheim type, and which accordingly should belong to the earlier first century BC. Whilst it is true that mirrors generally become larger over time, it would probably be an unwarranted simplification to equate the small size of the mirror and its elementary decoration with its early date (Joy, 2010: 150–1).

Most mirror burials of the south-eastern series appear to have few other grave-goods apart from the mirror, pottery or brooches being the commonest associated finds. Two burials stand out as having a more notable assemblage. The circumstances of the finds from Lexden Grange (Hull, 1948) were not well recorded, but in addition to the mirror the grave included a pedestal urn, two pottery flagons, and three cordoned vessels, including one particularly fine lidded cordoned bowl, but no imported wares. In addition, there was a small beaten bronze cup with cast bronze handle (Jope, 2000: 131–2, 138–9) and a bronze pin, all consistent with a dating around the first quarter of the first century AD. The pottery and the bronze cup imply food and drink, but the lidded bowl (Camulodunum form 252) was regarded by Hawkes and Hull (1947: 267 and pl. LXXXI) as a special funerary type. The other burial, from Dorton in Buckinghamshire (Farley, 1983), a westerly outlier of the Welwyn series of cremation burials, contained a similar drinking set inventory, with two handled flagons and a carinated pottery cup, but with the addition of three *amphorae*. Dorton, however, was unique in having unequivocal evidence for the closed association of the mirror with the cremated remains, the latter probably of an adult but too fragmentary to attribute to sex, both contained within a wooden box. Unfortunately the gas pipeline that uncovered this apparently isolated burial removed most of the key components of the grave, so that their layout had to be inferred from surviving fragments.

It is not clear that the same significance attached to Roman mirrors in late Iron Age and early Roman cemeteries. Among the several graves from King Harry Lane (Stead and Rigby, 1989) containing Roman mirrors, grave 325, assigned to phase 1, contained seven pottery vessels, including Augustan-Tiberian platters, beakers, and cup, but no flagons, among its sizeable grave inventory, together with bronze spoon and brooch and spindle whorls, the latter especially being conventionally attributed to female burials. From phase 2, spanning the conquest, grave 13 had a flagon, a small, pedestalled cup, and a two-handled 'honeypot', but no platters. The grave-goods also included two brooches, but the cremated remains in this instance were tentatively identified as those of a man. The early post-conquest 'mirror burial' CF115 from Stanway (Crummy et al., 2007) contained a two-handled flagon and a flanged cup, both Gaulish imports, and a glass unguent bottle, but no platter or indications of food. The introduction of Roman mirrors may of course have heralded a shift in the function and status of mirrors, but an association with drinking was evidently a recurrent theme of the funerary ritual, irrespective of the sex or status of the deceased.

As to the particular role of mirrors in the late pre-Roman Iron Age, Jope (2000: 137) recognized that they may have had 'a deeper significance, a means to conjure up the soul and transport it to the other world'. Giles and Joy (2007) pointed out that mirrors transpose left and right, but more especially they enable the viewer to see forward and behind simultaneously, and in



consequence in ethnographic contexts are used for divination of the future and for communing with the past. Whilst mirrors may well have had an important symbolic, even perhaps ritual role, it is nevertheless hard to avoid the probability that they did also have a practical function as toilet accessories, as they evidently had in Etruscan and Roman society.

In northern Britain in the later Iron Age mirrors are represented sculpturally on Class 1 'Pictish' symbol stones, sometimes in combination with representations of a single-sided comb, as at Dunnichen or on the Aberlemno roadside stone in Angus (Harding, 2007: fig. 11.5, 1 and 2), or with a double-sided comb as on the two stones from Dunrobin, Sutherland. The association would seem to endorse a role in personal grooming, yet the presence of symbols on these stones implies an importance that transcends simple domestic activities. Personal grooming may have been an important element in ceremonial and ritual events, such as inaugurations, so that it need not be assumed that mirrors or combs were only accessories for everyday use.

What remains to be explained is why decorated mirrors became such fashionable or prestigious items by the first century BC in southern Britain, when north Alpine continental societies in the late La Tène period appear not to have used mirrors. The enigma seems the greater on account of the fact that at the same time and through the Augustan period Italic imports of high-status items associated with the wine service not only appear in continental late La Tène graves but were acquired by communities in south-eastern England too. These services were presumably used for the consumption of Mediterranean wine, the import of which is testified by *amphorae* from Iron Age settlements and cemeteries from Hengistbury Head to Colchester, so that, in many respects, southern Britain was in close contact with continental fashion. Insular bronze-smiths had been noted for their innovative independence, particularly in the field of brooch making, for several centuries, so that it is perhaps hardly surprising that this independence should re-assert itself in a different artefact type in association with a new and vigorous insular artistic style in the later pre-Roman Iron Age. This new fashion began in the late second or early first centuries BC, but it reached its apogee in the later first century and on into the immediately pre-conquest period, when it seems that many of the material manifestations of Iron Age society, including signal burials, were designed to assert, with almost chauvinistic self-confidence, the independent status and identity of insular communities and their ruling elites. Later pre-Roman Iron Age societies in southern Britain were not averse to indulging themselves with the material products of the expanding Roman world, and some groups may even have been politically in liaison with Rome, but the prevailing regimes still asserted their political and cultural independence. The mirror par excellence is a possession for reinforcing the individual persona, and accordingly it could occur in principle in male as well as female graves.

Whether mirrors served a purpose beyond reflecting the image of the person holding it is arguable and ultimately incapable of resolution. In his Oxford lectures in the early 1960s, Christopher Hawkes remarked the irony that archaeologists were so concerned with the ornament on the reverse side of mirrors, when the lady who possessed it would have been more interested in the plain side. In retrospect we may wonder whether that was really true? For costume or cosmetic purposes, the plain side would have been more effective, though its utility was probably limited. But had she looked at the reverse side, her image would have had superimposed upon it the outline of a curvilinear design, one that, like her face, was composed symmetrically in fold-over symmetry about the vertical axis, but which, like her face, was not made up of exactly identical sides. If mirrors did indeed have a role in divination, then this is the side that would have transformed the image of the viewer and allowed her (or him) to gaze through the motifs and combinations of design that must surely have been potent symbols rather than mere decoration. A mirror's capacity to reflect light may also have been exploited if it served as an adjunct to ceremonial or ritual events. We can only speculate why mirrors became prominent in Britain but not in continental Europe, but an association with divination and ritual, in which Britain appears to have had a distinctive and independent tradition, might afford a plausible explanation.

## MEAT OFFERINGS

Meat offerings, as we have seen, are a regular part of funerary practice in the cemeteries of eastern Yorkshire, and of their continental counterparts. They are also a regular component in the late pre-Roman Iron Age cemeteries and burials of south-eastern England. But in none of these areas is there any clear evidence of different practice based on gender. Claims have been made for gender-specific associations, however, in one regional group of cemeteries, the concentration of Durotrigan burials in south Dorset. In reviewing the Whitcombe cemetery (Aitken and Aitken, 1990) Sharples developed a distinction remarked by Whimster (1981: 57) on the basis of the Maiden Castle and Whitcombe graves that

the sex of the deceased can be clearly expressed by the accompanying artefacts or by the species of animal present. The three female burials at Whitcombe were associated with pig whereas the two males with identified animal bones were associated with sheep/goat. A wider study of all Durotrigan burials (Chambers, 1978) has, however, shown that while pig is always associated with female burials and cattle, male burials, sheep/goat can be found with either.

(Sharples, 1990: 92)

The basis for selection is thus quite complex, and raises the question whether there are social criteria involved other than gender, such as marital status, or other factors altogether, such as season or time of month in which the funerary rites took place.

### ‘PICTISH’ CEMETERIES AND THE CASE FOR MATRILINY

Though we have not considered in detail the archaeological evidence for later Iron Age burial practices in the ‘Pictish’ regions of eastern and northern Scotland, there is every reason to suppose that social and cultural practices continued unabated in northern Britain beyond the Roman frontier until they were disrupted by the advent of Christianity. The first documentary reference to Picts is in Eumenius’ poem of AD 297, though it is more than probable that the ‘Picts’ date from an earlier horizon, as Eumenius himself believed. ‘Picti’ were not an ethnic group, as sometimes mistakenly believed; it was a term for native communities generally north of the frontier derived from *Preteni*, the native occupants of the Pretanic islands of Pytheas in the fourth century BC. The alternative, conventional interpretation, that ‘Picti’ was Roman army slang for ‘painted savages’, equally implies any of the native communities north of the frontier. In either view the social conventions of the ‘Picts’ must reflect older traditions in northern Britain at least. In the present context, therefore, it may be worth remarking that female burials appeared to predominate at Lundin Links, Fife (Greig et al., 2000), dating between the fifth and seventh centuries, and more arguably in the small cemetery with potentially earlier origins at Redcastle, Angus (Alexander, 2005), a factor that has revitalized in some quarters the older conventional belief, based upon a careless reading of Bede, that Pictish society was matrilineal. Bearing in mind that Bede claimed that the Picts had originated in Scythia, coming to Scotland via Ireland, we might suspect that he is not an entirely reliable witness, but because this popular mantra has been re-asserted, it is worth re-examining Bede’s exact observation, and its context:

cumque uxores Picti non habentes peterent a Scottis, ea solum condicione dare consenserunt, ut ubi res veniret in dubium, magis de feminea regum prosapia quam de masculina regem sibi eligerent; quod usque hodie apud Pictos constat esse servatum.

and the Picts having no wives with them petitioned the Irish, who agreed to provide them on the sole condition that, *when the issue was in doubt*, they should elect from the female royal lineage rather than the male, which practice has been observed among the Picts up to the present day.

Bede, *Historia Ecclesiastica*, I, 1 (*my italics*)

The crucial qualification was discounted by earlier authorities (Chadwick, 1949: 84; Henderson, 1967: 31), and has been largely ignored ever since. But it seems clear enough that invoking the matrilineal priority was an exception, a casting factor in case of deadlock, rather than the rule. More important, however, is Bede's confirmation that the choice of kings was not predetermined, for example by primogeniture, but was by election from among those who were eligible, which evidently could include individuals whose eligibility was through the female line. Woolf (1998) astutely remarked on Bede's additional comment, evidently not borrowed from his source, that the practice survived to the present day, suggesting that it might have been invoked in recent memory, and noting that the parent cited in the Pictish king lists for Bridie/Brude and Naiton/Nechtán named Derile/Derelei may have been female. The Pictish king lists were certainly unusual in not citing royal fathers, at least before the end of the eighth century, since the point of such lists must surely have been to legitimize succession, but this in itself is hardly an argument for matriliney. Woolf argued that Dál Riata was unusual in Britain in the number of royal sons who succeeded their fathers, and that the use of the female line in cases of doubt, as Bede claimed, was exactly the convention in other British dynasties, but not in the Anglo-Saxon or Irish. Had matrilineal succession been the norm among the Picts of later Iron Age Scotland, they would have been unique in early medieval Europe, and though the case for a matrilineal system has been argued cogently by Sellar (1985), on balance it is probably time to lay this popular mantra to rest. This need not rule out the possibility that succession in earlier and later Iron Age societies in Britain could have allowed bilateral claims.

This, of course, has no direct bearing on the apparent predominance of female burials in a given cemetery, since it is the line of descent not the gender of the individual that is the subject of Bede's observation, though that does not exclude the possibility that the individual from any eligible line might be a woman. Certainly the predominance of female graves in the 'horned cairn' from Lundin Links suggests selectivity on the basis of gender (and perhaps kin) in a tomb that stands out architecturally as grander than average. Indeed, Maldonado (2013) has suggested that selectivity in 'Pictish' cemeteries favoured not only female burials but females of early-middle adulthood. The other distinctive burial group at Lundin Links, the 'dumb-bell' cairns, contained male burials at either end with a female burial in the central element, reflecting a pattern that we have already seen in the earlier Iron Age burials at Wetwang Slack and at Birdlip. Notwithstanding the received wisdom, therefore, that biological sex or gender had only a marginal significance in Iron Age funerary conventions (Edwards and Pope, 2013), we might conclude that both could potentially have had a significant impact in burial, even if not as a general rule.



## Animal burials and animal symbolism

Animal remains may be deposited archaeologically in a great variety of circumstances, many of which must reflect their role in the domestic and agricultural economy of Iron Age communities, and result from normal disposal of the residues of butchery or consumption. In some circumstances the reason for disposal will have been death through disease or misadventure. The case of the cow in pit 61 of the phase 3 settlement at Gussage All Saints (Wainwright, 1979) that apparently died in calving is a case in point, though it is not clear why this animal was not processed for consumption, and we may suspect that an inauspicious omen was inferred that may have resulted in some special act of deposition. Ritual killing of animals, nevertheless, has been attested throughout Europe from earliest prehistory to the medieval period (Pluskowski, 2011). In reviewing animal sacrifices among the Gauls, Méniel (1992) divided the evidence into three principal categories of deposits found in habitation sites, in cemeteries, and in *sanctuaires*. The special character of those found on sanctuary sites, or accompanying human burials, individually or in cemeteries, is implicit from context, but animal burials that may have been deposited ritually on habitation sites are more difficult to distinguish from other forms of domestic or agricultural discard.

The key problem, of course, is distinguishing 'special deposits' from normal butchery waste, which itself may have been disposed of in a systematic but not ritually significant fashion, a notion that was first advanced by Maltby (1985b) in the context of the Winnall Down animal remains. Despite interest generated by the Danebury project in special treatment of animal remains, the majority of faunal material from the 1985–6 excavations at Maiden Castle (Sharples, 1991a) was interpreted as the product of animal husbandry for domestic consumption or secondary products. Even in the few instances in which a possible ritual dimension was conceded, the animal remains showed evidence of butchery, involving removal of skins and flesh and disarticulation of the skeletons. Special treatment in particular may have been accorded to dogs (Smith, 2006). From the earlier excavations at Maiden Castle, Wheeler suggested that the dog buried in a shallow pit in the fairway of the southern portal of the eastern entrance (Wheeler, 1943: pl. XV) may have been the

spiritual guard-dog of the gateway, while the remains of at least two dogs were recovered among the residue of ritual feasting from context 6265 of the more recent excavations.

Since the excavation at Danebury lent credibility to the idea of special deposits, virtually any assemblage of animal bones in pits or ditches has been potentially and often quite uncritically regarded as a candidate for ritual deposition (Wilson, 1992). Commentators in recent years have therefore shied away from the use of the term 'special deposit' for these remains, since plainly it implies a degree of pre-judgement of their significance, preferring instead the less elegant if more objective phrase 'associated bone group' or ABG, though singling out these groups from the generality of faunal assemblages still carries with it a strong implication of special status. The great majority of claimed special deposits have been found in pits, often presumed to be redundant grain storage pits. A consequence of this is that the distribution of special deposits is heavily biased towards settlements south and east of the Jurassic ridge, that is, in those parts of lowland Britain where grain storage pits are concentrated. In northern and western Britain there are accordingly fewer examples of special deposits, though their special character may be more obvious in consequence.

What makes special deposits special may be highly subjective, but selectivity or particular treatment of the remains may be indicative. Where partial remains are deposited it is important to question what happened to the remainder. If skulls and feet are missing, it may be that these were removed in the process of skinning, as in the so-called 'heads and hoofs' rite (Piggott, 1962). Where only the axial portions survive, it is possible that the rest, including limb joints, were selected for feasting. Where the animal remains have been manipulated in some way, as was apparently the case at Winterborne Kingston (Cheetham et al., 2013), where composite skeletons had seemingly been re-assembled from cows and horses, and especially where this was combined with human burial, it is not unreasonable to claim a special significance.

Special animal deposits, of course, are not unique to the Iron Age, and are common from at least the Neolithic to medieval times. The proportions of domestic species selected for special treatment fluctuated, perhaps not surprisingly, though reasons are harder to put forward. In the southern English Iron Age, according to Morris's (2011; summary in 2012) sample, sheep/goat continued to dominate from a high point in the Bronze Age, with cattle falling to third place from its Neolithic predominance, being overtaken surprisingly by dog, a species that continues to rise to pre-eminence in special deposits in the Romano-British period. Horse and pig occur in much smaller proportions, though the instance of pig deposits in the cemeteries of eastern Yorkshire is sufficient warning that the balance could be significantly affected by regional variation. Morris's figures, nevertheless, are sufficient to indicate that ABGs were governed by conventions that did not reflect the broader representation

of faunal remains from settlements or hillforts. Wild mammals and birds constitute a small minority, a fact that, as Morris remarked (2012: 10), should qualify any undue significance attributed to animals and birds in art and iconography.

## ANIMAL DEPOSITS IN HILLFORTS

Among special deposits of animal bones from older excavations, one of the most intriguing was Pit B1a on Site B at Maiden Castle (Fig. 4.1), a large pit that Wheeler, belatedly adhering to the older generational belief in 'pit-dwellings', described as having

a continuous ring of mutton bones round its periphery, suggesting that the family had squatted round their hearth in the centre and had thrown the gnawed bones over their shoulder.

(Wheeler, 1943: 90)

This bizarre image was greeted by a later generation of students, brought up to believe that Iron Age communities inhabited not squalid pits but sophisticated round-houses like Little Woodbury, with gales of laughter, but we never thought to explain how instead the ring of mutton bones, clearly shown in Wheeler's photograph (1943: pl. CVIII, immaculately excavated if not re-assembled for the photograph), came to be so neatly arranged around the fringes of the pit. The answer now would surely be that this was a deliberate deposit, which would be entirely consistent with a belief that the eastern summit of the hillfort, close by one end of the old Neolithic long mound, was a focal point for religious activities in the middle Iron Age.

Not surprisingly a major initiative in the study of Iron Age animal deposits from hillforts with the benefit of a significant sample was the Danebury project, where Grant (1984) adduced cogent reasons for believing that some burials at least were special, though Wilson (1992) showed that the criteria were vulnerable to rigorous scrutiny. A notable example of manipulation of the remains and of potentially significant associations was the horse and dog burial from pit 321, where the head of the horse had been removed and placed adjacent to the dog skeleton, while fifty sling-stones and several chalk blocks were found in association with the horse. Grant further noted that the proportions of animal burials of a given species did not always accord with their incidence in the population as a whole, notably in the case of sheep, which were under-represented relative to their dominance in the total population, in contrast to horse and dog, both of which were over-represented. This evidently suggests a degree of selectivity in animal burial, though in the latter case it could obviously reflect the fact that these two breeds were not primarily



bred as a food resource (Madgwick, 2008). Evidence of butchery in these special deposits was limited, suggesting in some cases that the animals were buried whole and not even skinned. Skulls that had been buried separately showed little sign of butchery. In the early and late phases at Danebury, skulls of sheep, cattle, pig, and horse were notably prolific (Grant, 1984: table 92). Beside whole or near-complete skeletons, the animal assemblage from special deposits showed much the same range of articulation or disarticulation as human remains. Some articulated limbs, like the articulated horse leg from pit 99, showed some traces that might be consistent with removal of hides or even a measure of defleshing from what, in the case of sheep, cattle, and pigs at any rate, would otherwise have been productive meat joints. Not all special deposits furthermore were of domesticated breeds. Given the small percentage of bird bones in the overall assemblage, the occurrence of raven among special animal deposits was considered to be statistically significant, and their corresponding absence from human burials likewise (*ibid.* 540). In sum, Grant concluded that there was indeed evidence from Danebury to support the belief that 'the Danebury special deposits represent sacrifices or propitiation offerings' (*ibid.* 543), even if the animals chosen for this purpose were not necessarily those that were dominant in terms of the agricultural economy. This perhaps suggests ritual conventions that transcended local circumstances, even if they were invoked to ameliorate local problems.

Most of the material from Danebury was retrieved from pits within the interior, rather than from the enclosing earthworks, not surprisingly since this was largely the focus of the excavation, which at the time justifiably saw the stripping of the interior as a priority. Nevertheless, an important feature of the hilltop was its earlier demarcation as a site of sanctity in the form of ritual pits, discovered by chance beyond the middle earthwork, and dated tentatively to a primary phase of hillfort or pre-hillfort activity. The deposition of three dogs (Cunliffe, 1971: 242) or two dogs and a range of fragments from other species (Cunliffe, 1984: 12) in ritual pit A was followed by the erection of a massive totem, some 60 cm in diameter, in what may have been a henge-like ring of posts intermittently around the summit.

By the time the concluding volume of the Danebury report was published (Cunliffe, 1995) the excavators were persuaded that special deposits applied to a much wider range of artefactual and occupational residues, including organic materials that would not normally be expected to survive archaeologically. Furthermore, they distinguished two contrasting patterns of pit fillings, those that accumulated in a succession of stages, including natural erosion and in-wash, and those that appeared to have been accomplished more rapidly. Pits of all the principal types, beehive (the great majority), cylindrical and rectangular included both slow and fast cycle fillings, and special deposits were found in all pit types and with both fill patterns. Cunliffe argued that pits were used, within hillforts and in non-fortified settlements, for propitiatory

offerings as part of their life-cycle as storage receptacles, where he believed 'that the seed corn could be placed in the protection of the chthonic deities during the liminal period between harvest and sowing' (2000: 130). On the basis of evidence from sites sampled by the Danebury Environs Programme he could see no difference in behaviour patterns in other settlements, and concluded that 'propitiatory offerings in pits was a universal practice and does not appear to have been restricted to sites of any particular status' (ibid. 131).

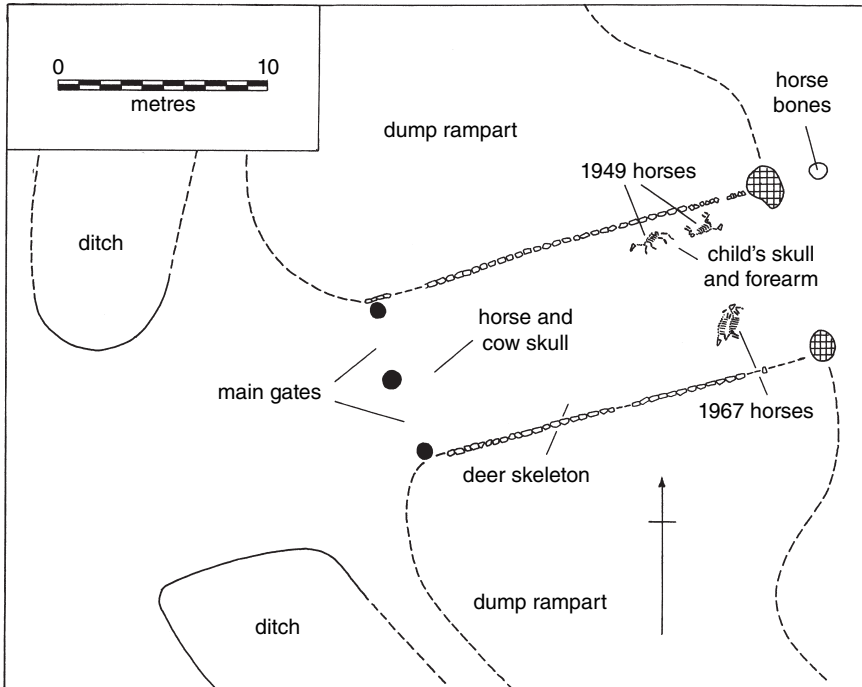
Though propitiatory offerings no doubt were endemic in Iron Age belief systems, it remains arguable whether such a high proportion of faunal and artefactual assemblages found in pits can all be assigned special significance, though Danebury through its focal role may well have witnessed such activities on a larger scale than was practised domestically elsewhere. Beehive pits involving large-scale storage of grain may have required special propitiation rituals that may not have been necessary elsewhere. By comparison, the cylindrical pits at Segsbury (Lock et al., 2005) were not obviously designed for grain storage, and relatively few showed evidence for special deposition involving either human or animal bones, though some included apparently deliberate artefactual deposits. Pit 1019 contained remains of sheep/goat, the dominant species on the site, in its lower fills, and a human infant skeleton in the top layer. In fact, the Segsbury pattern suggested that the final fill was perhaps most significant, and that there may have been some time lapse in successive fillings (ibid. 131). There was some evidence for habitation, though hardly intensive, so that Segsbury may have been a place of periodic assembly, perhaps in connection with the annual farming cycle, and in the context of seasonal celebrations, it would be hard archaeologically to distinguish feasting residues from propitiatory deposits.

The evidence from Bury Hill (Cunliffe and Poole, 2000a) endorses the belief that deposition was designed for specific purposes at different sites. Here there was minimal evidence of any practices involving human burial; instead, horses and equestrian gear seem to be a dominant element in the faunal and artefactual assemblage. As at Segsbury, the significant remains were more commonly in the upper fillings of the pits. Four pits contained items of horse-gear and vehicle parts, pits P24 and P45 being particularly prolific. These appeared to be distributed through the sequence of layers that indicated phases of abandonment before a subsequent episode of deposition (ibid. 79–80). It is noteworthy that pits occur much less densely at Bury Hill than at Danebury, and residual evidence suggests that grain production and storage on a large scale was not here a primary concern. These special deposits therefore may reflect the hillfort's role as a centre for breaking and training wild horses—the faunal remains suggesting that they were not actually bred on site, and not used as a meat resource—and possibly also for the production of equestrian gear and vehicle fittings. Special deposits were therefore dedicated to purpose, and were not standard among hillforts or non-fortified settlements.

If Bury Hill served as a horse-training station, Blewburton Hill (Collins, 1953; Harding, 1976) may well have had a similar role. Though the interior of the hillfort has only been sampled on a very limited scale, there is no evidence for storage pits unless they are concentrated in an area not yet investigated, whilst the occurrence of horse burials may reasonably be taken as evidence of the importance of horses in the local economy. Principal among those burials are the two pairs from the latest phase of the entrance passage (Fig. 9.1). Collins (1953: 57) was inclined to see these, together with the collapsed stonework of the flanking walls of the passage, as evidence of violent sacking of the hillfort, though, in view of the absence of any vestige of Roman material, he attributed this event to a pre-conquest episode in the first century BC. In fact, the evidence for violent destruction is minimal, not comparable to that witnessed in the entrances at Rainsborough, Northamptonshire (Avery et al., 1967), or Danebury, for example, and it seems more likely that the hillfort was abandoned at some time in the late second or early first century BC in common with a number of hillforts in Hampshire and Sussex. This need not preclude the possibility of some closure ceremony in the western entrance in which the gates were formally decommissioned and the two pairs of horses were buried within the inner entrance. The presence of other deposits (Collins, 1953: 39), the skulls of horse and cow, deer skeleton, and skull and forearm of a child, might be consistent with ritual activity. The discovery of seven or eight horses from Blewburton plainly indicates a special interest, and the probability is that horse rearing or training was important on the Berkshire Downs in the Iron Age as it is today.

Among the various roles fulfilled by hillforts it is reasonable to assume that they were places of periodic assembly for festivals and feasting. Apart from the pits with human burials at Castle Hill, Little Wittenham, the only notable special deposit was one early Iron Age pit that was remarkable for its size and for the quantities of animal and artefactual debris that it contained. Pit 3006 was certainly not a re-used storage pit: at 3.50 m in diameter and only 0.75 m in depth it hardly qualifies as a pit in the standard Wessex format. The animal remains represented at least four cattle, nineteen sheep, and eight pigs, including a number of neonatal animals, leading the excavators to surmise that this was the product of spring-time feasting (Allen et al., 2010: 88, 256), a complete raven skeleton adding a possible ritual dimension. The significance of the deposit is enhanced by the fact that there were no other pits of the early Iron Age found within the hillfort, as opposed to the surrounding settlement, where early and middle Iron Age pits occurred in almost equal numbers.

We have already noted enclosed sites in which deposits of human bone were located by entrances. Not strictly a hillfort in the normally accepted sense (Harding, 2012: 155–6), Rams Hill on the Berkshire Downs (Bradley and Ellison, 1975) had foundation deposits in successive phases of its southern entrance. In the second phase of timber-framed wall-rampart, the terminal pit



**Fig. 9.1** Blewburton Hill, Oxfordshire (Berkshire), 'closure episode' of western entrance, A (upper), final phase entrance plan, B (lower), horse skeletons from 1967 excavations. Drawing adapted from Collins 1953 and Harding 1976; photograph by D. W. Harding and A. D. Phillips.

on the west side of the entrance contained a dog skeleton, whilst postholes 16 and 17 flanking the passage of phase 3 contained a sheep and pig burial respectively. These deposits were used subsequently to confirm the dating of the Rams Hill sequence to the Penard and Wilburton phases of the Middle and Late Bronze Age (Needham and Ambers, 1994). By contrast, the western entrance, narrower and simpler in design, and clearly unsuitable for animal traffic, had no such deposits.

Non-domestic species are not commonly represented in hillfort pit deposits, so that pit 3825 at Winklebury was a notable exception (Smith, 1977) in containing a red deer and twelve foxes. There was no evidence of butchery, and the deer may have been buried intact and unskinned. In fact the faunal evidence from Iron Age sites in southern England and from Danebury especially suggests that deer were not significantly exploited as a food resource. Equally there was nothing to indicate the reason for so many foxes in a single deposit. These factors alone might prompt the notion that this was a votive deposit. A cull of foxes might well have been a periodic necessity to protect flocks and livestock, but it is hard to understand why the carcasses should have been brought back for burial in a pit within the hillfort. A single whole skeleton of a raven, found spread-eagled on the bottom of pit 2611 at Winklebury, could likewise have been simply disposal of a scavenger, but the raven's magico-religious role in early literature was cited as one possible explanation for the high incidence of raven burials at Danebury (Cunliffe, 1983: 159). Whilst the bird bone assemblage from Danebury may not have been significantly higher in percentage terms than those recovered from non-hillfort settlements investigated in the Environs Programme, the high proportion of raven from Danebury itself is surely remarkable. The fact that the basic data is influenced by the incidence of whole or partial skeletons (Coy, 1984: 527) is hardly misleading if it reflects the special selection or treatment of ravens.

#### ANIMAL DEPOSITS IN NON-FORTIFIED SETTLEMENTS

Perhaps not surprisingly the first serious attempt to analyse the *manner of deposition* (his italics) of pit fillings was by Gerhard Bersu (1940) at Little Woodbury, where he observed that most pits showed rapid filling, except for the topmost layer which accumulated naturally after subsidence of the core, and that there was little evidence of natural silting. Bersu was meticulous in observing the detail of pit fillings, recording sections in his characteristic pictorial style, as opposed to the Wheelerian fashion for schematic interpretation that prevailed for a generation and more. A full inventory of finds, however, was

never published, though section drawings of pits 113 and 115 show animal skulls deposited in the mid-upper and lower filling of these pits, and a dog was reported from pit 102. As to function, of course, Bersu was determined to nail the pre-war myth that pits had served as dwellings, and to show alternatively that grain storage was their most likely purpose, so that the idea of propitiatory pits, even as a secondary function, hardly entered into his reckoning.

The published account of the Winnall Down excavation (Fasham, 1985) also regarded the faunal remains primarily as evidence of the domestic economy, with little regard for the possibility of special deposits, as subsequently postulated by Hill (1995). Nevertheless, the very large quantities of animal bone from pit 6595, including almost complete skeletons of a sow and a dog, were plainly exceptional. They had been placed in the lower levels of the pit, the dog on its right side and sealed by a layer of compressed chalk which belies casual disposal, or even disposal of 'deliberate rubbish' (Maltby, 1985a: 25). The lowest levels also contained significant quantities of butchered cattle and horse bones, cattle mandibles alone representing a minimum of twelve animals. The deposits above the chalk sealing contained a further ten cattle mandibles, in sharp contrast to the overall dominance of sheep/goat in the faunal assemblage as a whole, and in the pits in particular. Pit 6595 stands apart from the main pit cluster, in isolation close by house V, further suggesting that it represents activity other than normal domestic disposal. The same specialist was responsible for the faunal remains from Old Down Farm, Andover (Davies, 1981), where the great majority of the animal bones was recovered from pits within the interior, rather than from the enclosure ditch. Copious evidence of butchery suggested that this material was indeed the waste product of domestic consumption, and that some pits, like pits 937, 2492, and 2493 from phase 2, containing 1,820 bone fragments, many from the same beasts, were dug specially to dispose of waste that would otherwise only attract flies and scavengers.

Occasionally animal burials are accompanied by other artefacts, but it is seldom possible to be confident that these are deliberate associations. One such example is the burial of fragmentary animal remains of horse and cattle in the redundant butt end of the ditch adjacent to the southern entrance at Pimperne (Harding et al., 1993). The entrance had been redesigned to accommodate 'antennae' ditches that led to a secondary, smaller enclosure to the south, interpreted as a stock corral, so that the southern entrance was seen primarily as access for stock, in contrast to the more elaborate eastern entrance that would have served for human traffic. Each entrance yielded special deposits in their ditches, notably human remains in the eastern gateway, and appropriately animal deposits in the southern entrance (Fig. 9.2A, B). The two chalk lamps certainly appeared to have been placed deliberately, one with the cattle bones, the other with the horse. Neither bore any trace of sooting through use, so that they may well have been token rather than utilitarian.



Fig. 9.2 Pimperne Down, Dorset, south entrance, animal burials with chalk lamps, A (upper), chalk lamp with cattle remains, B (lower), chalk lamp with horse remains. Photographs by I. M. Blake and D. W. Harding.

One argument for regarding animal deposits as special is where their placement appears to be carefully arranged, as at Suddern Farm (Cunliffe and Poole, 2000b), where multiple deposits in close proximity occur in several of the pits. These are characteristically found near the bottom of the pit, and commonly involve the placing of skull and limb bone in combination. Deliberate and careful deposition is reasonably inferred from the annular or penannular disposition of the bones, and the fact that one deposit may enclose another, but it is not easy from the published report to establish the exact contents of the key pits or any material associations of the animal deposits. The special deposits at Suddern Farm belonged mostly to the early and middle Iron Age, but some continued into the Romano-British phase of occupation, showing a measure of continuity in cult practice, and possibly even the deliberate curation of pottery for later deposition (*ibid.* 151).

It has been argued that special selection may be inferred where a deposit is not representative of the species or proportions of species normally found in domestic refuse. In the Upper Thames region, one assemblage that qualifies in these terms is from Gravelly Guy (Lambrick and Allen, 2004), where all the major domestic species were represented in what the excavators termed 'exceptional animal bone deposits', but significantly dog and horse were the most numerous (Lambrick and Allen, 2004: table 6.1), in contrast to the faunal assemblage overall, in which sheep/goats and cattle predominated. In particular there were three dogs buried together in pit 1291. It was notable that virtually all the two dozen dog burials were of complete animals, and their preference for resting on the right side rather than the left by a factor of 2:1 seemingly mimicked that of the human population from the site (*ibid.* tables 6.3, 6.5). Their orientation, however, showed no consistent pattern, unlike cattle skulls, which appeared to be aligned mainly to north-west or south-east. Sheep/goat occurred both as complete skeletons and as disarticulated fragments, whereas cattle and horses were most commonly represented by skulls, indicating a degree of selectivity in the choice of deposits or in the processes that resulted in the deposits. One complete horse was recovered from a pit cutting the corner of Enclosure 1 in the late Iron Age–early Roman occupation. There was not much evidence for butchery, though skulls of various species, found without mandibles, were evidently butchered and defleshed.

There was no evidence at Gravelly Guy of distributional clustering of animal deposits, which occurred throughout the areas of domestic occupation. For the most part they were found in pits, with the notable exception of a series of horse and cattle skulls found in several contexts in the ditch of Enclosure B3. In contrast to the preference for human deposits in the middle and upper fillings of pits, animal burials were frequently found in the lowest levels. They were commonly associated with stone, often burnt, and sometimes with pottery sherds, an association also noted in the case of human burials (Wait *et al.*, 2004: 221–3). This coincidence of practice further points to their being intentional deposits, not



simply the product of domestic waste, nor yet even of ritual feasting. For Gravelly Guy Lambrick and Allen (2004: 489–90) as a measure of deliberation envisaged ‘two axes of variation’, involving different apparent degrees of veneration and different degrees of deliberation in deposition (*ibid.* table 12.1).

At Yarnton there appeared to be a progressive decline in special depositions through the Iron Age, though the practice nevertheless still lasted into the Romano-British period, when it may have been perpetuated deliberately to sustain a native tradition (Fulford, 2001). One possible example of this at Yarnton was the assemblage of twelve right cattle femurs with other bones in the early Roman pit 1060, which echoes the deposit in the middle Iron Age ditch 7789 of cattle femur fragments that had the appearance of a selective, deliberate deposit. Notwithstanding the problems of distinguishing special deposits from routine butchery waste, it would be hard to explain the sheep burial in pit 330 as other than a votive deposit. The complete skeleton was at the bottom of the pit, on its right side, with head turned back. But it was composite, made up from at least two animals. Both forelimbs were right side limbs, and from a younger animal than the mandible. The pit also included significant amounts of metalworking debris, including crucible fragments and copper alloy slag, which raises the possibility that any propitiatory intention could have been directed at objectives other than simply agricultural productivity. Other burials of left-side elements only, like the lamb in posthole 1314, may equally have been the result of intentional selection, while the hind limbs of a dog in pit 7762 were buried on the left from femur to metatarsals and on the right from tibia downwards. There were relatively few horse bones from the Yarnton and Cresswell Field pits, so it must surely be significant that all three pits that contained human fragments also contained horse bones.

Several articulated animal burials from Latton Lands (Powell et al., 2009) were apparently buried in specially dug pits, rather than in re-used storage silos, in two instances in sufficient proximity to houses to suggest the possibility of foundation deposits for those buildings. In the early Iron Age phase of the central settlement, a young horse had been buried at the back of the major round-house 2760, diametrically opposed to its south-east facing porch, and effectively on the outer wall-line, had there been an outer stake-wall aligned with the outer porch posts. In the northern settlement a partial calf burial occupied an adjacent position close by the probable outer wall of round-house 3349. Broadly contemporary in the eastern settlement was round-house 1829, again with a projecting south-east facing porch, which unusually had an extra pair of posts. In one posthole was found a cache of pottery sherds and burnt animal bone. Since these were in the post-pipe itself rather than the packing, it presumably was introduced when the post was withdrawn, so that the excavator reasonably supposed that this may have been a deliberate deposit (*ibid.* 36), marking the renovation of the porch or the decommissioning of the building altogether. It certainly seems possible to argue for a tradition of

foundation and decommissioning rites on the basis of the Latton Lands round-houses involving the burial of animal remains.

For the most part, domestic species dominate special deposits of animal remains, though the red and roe deer incorporated in the surface of the flood-plain causeway at Yarnton, in an assemblage that shows a bias towards right side cattle limbs, again could be significant. Salvage excavation, however, on the line of the new A2 alongside the Channel Tunnel Rail Link in north Kent exposed several Iron Age settlements where pits contained unusual deposits that warranted consideration under the heading of structured deposition. Perhaps most striking, because it contained the great majority of faunal remains from the site, was pit 147 at Northumberland Bottom near Gravesend (Askew, 2006). Nearly 14 kg of bones included parts of three red deer and six partially articulated calves, radiocarbon dated to the middle pre-Roman Iron Age, which the excavator interpreted as the remains of a ritual feast or successive feasts. Other pits on the Pepperhill to Cobham section of the A2 (Allen et al., 2012) likewise were regarded as special deposits, in some cases including the waste products of a salt-making industry. Pit 9052 on Site G had on its floor the skeleton of a young deer and remains of a raven, whilst pit 9010, as we have seen, contained both human and animal bones.

If some special deposits were propitiatory offerings designed to secure a bounteous harvest or fecundity of livestock, then we might expect the deposit to reflect this in its composition, allowing always for the probability that the nature of offerings was prescribed by ritual conventions. In general the archaeological evidence is insufficient to detect subtle intra-site differences, but it is notable, for example, at Fairfield Park in the eastern Chilterns (Webley et al., 2007) that, among articulated animal remains found in pits, cattle were not included, though they were a significant component of the overall site assemblage. Instead the special deposits comprised nine sheep/goats and a single dog on site A and two sheep/goats with three pigs and a dog on site B. Together with the unique assemblage of forty-nine burnt sheep metapodials from pit 484 on site A, the special deposits seem to reflect an unusual economic bias in this region towards sheep rearing in which cattle may have been kept principally for secondary products (Holmes, 2007: 116).

Where special deposits of animal remains do not accord with the faunal profile from the settlement at large, one reason, as we have seen, is the presence of species that were not kept primarily as a food resource, notably dog and horse. Dogs were doubtless bred for hunting, for herding, as domestic guard-dogs, and as pets, and they often are found as complete skeletons, as at Little Woodbury, Gussage All Saints, Longbridge Deverill, and Winnall Down, but seldom in the numbers recorded at Gravelly Guy. Further north at Site M on the A1 (Bates, 2007) two separate dog burials, as elsewhere, could simply have been routine burials of domestic pets or working dogs, while other examples were

recorded from Dalton Parlours (Wrathmell and Nicholson, 1990) within, though not necessarily contemporary with, houses.

Finally we should consider the possibility that animal deposits on settlements may be the product of communal or ritual feasting. Whilst we might expect such activities to be focused on hillforts, other enclosed sites may have served as communal or ritual centres in regions in which hillforts are not typically represented. One of the most striking deposits is from Wattle Syke, Wetherby in west Yorkshire (Chadwick, 2010: 404), where an articulated sheep skeleton lay on a mass of butchered bones in the upper ditch fill, while in an adjacent section of the ditch two complete pig skeletons, one apparently in crouched posture, the other supine, rested over a deposit of butchered cattle bones and a complete pottery vessel. The manner of deposition here perhaps suggests a placed deposit rather than casual discard. At a later date a small pit had been cut into the side of the ditch to accommodate an infant burial. This complex settlement evidently displays a long history of ritual deposits involving both human and animal burials from the later pre-Roman Iron Age to the later Roman period (Martin et al. 2013).

## ANIMAL BURIALS WITH HUMAN BURIALS

Animal remains that accompany human burial, in formal cemeteries and in occasional graves, may themselves fall into several distinct categories. We have already seen that some human burials are accompanied by articulated or semi-articulated joints of meat that might variously be interpreted as residues from the funerary banquet, food for the journey into the otherworld, or as ritual offerings to supernatural forces. In the case of cremation, it is possible that animals were sacrificed on the pyre to accompany the dead, and in consequence animal bone may be incorporated in the pyre debris together with human remains. Finally, there are, in association with human interments, burials of animals, in whole or in part, either within the grave or in close proximity, that are not obviously intended as food offerings, but which may have been the equivalent of, or even proxy for, attendant sacrifices.

An often cited instance of an exceptional burial of human with animals is the horse with rider and dog from the main ditch at Blewburton Hill (Collins, 1953: 31). The graphic image of the rider and horse being launched to their doom from the ramparts has proved an enduring one, but it is hardly sustained by a rational analysis of the site context and stratigraphy. Collins's section of cutting F appears to show the narrow bottom of a primary ditch that was widened with recutting, perhaps at the time when the degraded box rampart was renovated as a dump. If this were true, the dog would have been in the primary deposit, while horse and rider rested at the level of the secondary recut.

But in fact, none of the other sections preserve any trace of a narrow primary ditch, so that the feature at the bottom of the ditch in cutting F, deeper anyway than the ditch in cutting G or in either of the 1967 cuttings, is more likely to have been a pit, the edges of which could easily have spanned the narrow excavated section. The dog would then have been inserted first, with horse and rider above, with the associated artefacts, adze, pin, and burnished pot, whatever their significance, all constituting a structured deposit, not the arbitrary outcome of a theatrical charade. The burial of human with horse, whether male or probably female, as now claimed (Bendry et al., 2010), is unusual, though not without parallel if the report of the find from Mildenhall, Suffolk, is reliable (Bunbury, 1834). None of the British examples, of course, is on the scale of the Gondole burials from the Auvergne (Deberge et al., 2009), where eight horses and riders (or perhaps grooms?) were buried in what is now widely regarded as a ritual deposit outside the late Iron Age *oppidum*.

A striking example of the association of human and animals remains in burial was from Viabes Farm, Basingstoke (Millett and Russell, 1982). The date of the deposit is contentious; the report favoured a span between the third and first centuries BC, while more recently Gibson (2004) has argued for a date at the turn of the millennia BC/AD. The burial, as we have seen, contained two human skeletons (Fig. 7.4), possibly an example of attendant sacrifice or suicide. The animal burials were equally striking. The head of the principal human burial rested on one of two complete sheep, a physical association that is extremely unusual even where human and animal remains are found in the same pit. Neither animal, a ram and a ewe, had been butchered, so that these were plainly not remnants of, or prepared for, a funerary feast. In addition, there were in the pit filling below the human burials parts of two horses, significantly lacking their forelimbs, a feature that has been noted in horse burials elsewhere. Finally, substantial parts of two cattle were recovered that did show signs of having been butchered. It seems clear, therefore, that not all the animals in the grave were included for the same reason. Some may have been butchered for a funerary feast or to provide food offerings for inclusion in the grave. Others may have been included for quite different reasons. The sequence of construction and deposition clearly reflects a careful and considered ritual, but what is implied in the close association of two of each of three key domestic species with a double female burial can only be surmised. Plainly animals were a key element in the lifestyle of the individuals involved, as seems also to be reflected in the artefactual assemblage.

The physical association of animals and humans at Viabes Farm is most closely matched by the Late Bronze Age pit 3666 at Cliffs End Farm, Pegwell Bay, discussed earlier (Fig. 7.7), where the elderly woman who appeared to be the principal burial had been laid on a pair of neonatal lambs, with another pair of lambs beside her. One of the subsidiary burials, a teenage girl, had her head resting on the skull and neck of a cow. The burial pit and its associated

deposits were described as ‘orchestrated’ (McKinley et al., 2013: 170), in a manner that the subsequent early and middle Iron Age burials from Cliffs End were not, though they too presumably were the product of ‘non-normative’ special ritual activity in the same mortuary area.

One of the clearest instances of human burials being associated with animal burials in the pre-Roman Iron Age is the ritual activity area that may have preceded the construction of the middle Iron Age hillfort at the Prebendal, Aylesbury in Buckinghamshire (Farley and Jones, 2012). The focus of ritual and burial was an irregular, sub-triangular area less than 6 metres across and scooped out of the natural limestone that the excavator compared to so-called ‘working hollows’ of Iron Age settlements in Wessex and elsewhere. It had no obvious boundary in the form of ditch or gully, and no apparent structures indicated by postholes. It comprised a series of five principal human burials and a greater number of animal burials, aligned on a north–south axis down the west side of the area, with a great concentration of animal bone on the east side. Radiocarbon dates from the human burials suggested their deposition in the first third of the fourth century BC, perhaps just before the construction of the hillfort. Had the ritual site still been in use during the hillfort’s occupation, it would have been very close to the rampart on the hillfort’s western side, and the recutting of the ditch to form an enlarged dump rampart would surely have covered it, perhaps accounting for the preservation of the remains.

The five principal burials comprised one mature adult, probably female, three children aged around 4, 10, and 12, and one juvenile, hardly, as the excavators explained, representative of normal expectations of the age profile in a community cemetery. The burials were not all complete. Some had seemingly been disturbed by later pits, but there was ‘some evidence . . . that human body parts were missing at the point of deposition . . . and there was certainly evidence for re-arrangement of other parts’ (ibid. 74), notably in the case of adult burial 3. There was no evidence that bones had been gnawed, so any displacement of the remains cannot readily be attributed to scavengers, and we must therefore presume that there was adequate covering of the remains up to the time that they were sealed by the later rampart. In among the burials were numerous other human bones that could not be attributed to the five principal burials, and which derived from a minimum of four other individuals, mainly adult. The close relationship between animals and humans is best represented by burial 1, a 12-year-old with head and some body parts missing, but apparently buried in a supine posture with legs wide apart, the right femur resting on the skeleton of a goat. The goat was laid in an unusual position, with its head turned back by the child’s right hand. A substantial part of a sheep rested by the child’s back, with the left foreleg beneath his or her pelvis. In all, no less than seven animals were associated with this burial, and though the relationship to the human burials in other cases was less obvious, it is clear overall that this was a deliberate and meaningful association. This probability is reinforced by the fact that, with the

exception of one pig and one certain instance of goat, all the animals were sheep. There were no artefactual associations with the human burials, and the majority of pottery and other finds derived from the eastern midden material.

By contrast the mass of animal bone on the east side of the ritual area contained several cattle, a horse, and two pigs, though sheep still predominated, with only one human bone. The two sides of the area thus seemed clearly segregated for different purposes. The obvious explanation, that this was the residue of ritual feasting, is hampered by the fact that there was only minimal evidence for butchery. A small proportion of the bones was burnt, which might support the idea of feasting. The excavators' overall interpretation was that the site was for ritual activities, though the limited scale of the surviving evidence constrains interpretation of the site as a major communal venue. In view of extensive later occupation, it is possible that the original extent of Iron Age activity has been eroded, but the Aylesbury deposits were not comparable to the later Bronze Age or earlier Iron Age midden sites of Wessex and elsewhere like Potterne or East Chisenbury, where deposits may have accumulated over much longer periods of time. It seems entirely plausible to regard the animal burials as the product of ritual feasting or sacrifice, but the question remains whether the human burials should be interpreted in the same way. In the absence of evidence of trauma on the bones themselves, the issue remains open, but this possibility need not be excluded (*ibid.* 75). The balance of evidence suggests that the ritual deposits preceded the construction of the hillfort, though this need not exclude the possibility of a link between the earlier phase of activity and the purpose of the latter.

## ANIMAL DEPOSITS FROM EAST YORKSHIRE CEMETERIES AND SETTLEMENTS

We have already noted the occasional provision of joints of meat in the cemeteries of eastern Yorkshire, including several of the chariot burials, though the frequency of animal deposits should not be overrated, with pig remains occurring in only around 5 per cent of the Makeshift graves at Rudston (Morris, 2011). Morris's key point, however, was the apparent distinction between the domestic and funerary assemblages of the Iron Age in eastern Yorkshire, where pig is very much in the minority in settlement assemblages. In contrast to Wessex, however, where sheep/goats tend to predominate in the domestic assemblage, on most of the Yorkshire sites cattle are in the majority, with sheep/goats in the ascendancy only in the Garton-Wetwang settlement (68 per cent) and at Dalton Parlours (71 per cent). Yet at Garton-Wetwang in a dozen associated bone groups cattle were predominant against the trend, thus underlining their special character (Morris, 2011).

Most obviously part of a formal ritual deposition were the animal remains associated with the chariot burial at Ferry Fryston in west Yorkshire discussed earlier (Boyle et al., 2007). Two deposits are here of particular interest. The first was an assemblage of cattle bones, representing the remains of at least twenty-five beasts, and including several partial skulls, found just above the primary silt of the barrow ditch. Radiocarbon dates for these bones indicated that they were statistically contemporary with the burial. The excavators believed that this material had eroded from the top of the barrow, where it was suggested that the skulls in particular had been placed upon completion of the barrow. None of these bones was articulated, and none showed overt signs of butchery, but it was suggested that they had been part of the funerary feast and had been placed on the barrow as part of the final rites (*ibid.* 158). So pig bones were included with the deceased in the Ferry Fryston grave in accordance with the selective east Yorkshire tradition, but the cattle bones from the ditch suggested a different requirement for the funerary feast.

A second point of interest from the Ferry Fryston barrow was a massive accumulation of cattle bones, representing a minimum of 162 animals, in the upper filling of the ditch. This material was radiocarbon dated between the first and fourth centuries AD, and possibly resulted from more than one episode of activity. The preponderance of skulls and right forelimbs shows a degree of selectivity that militates against this being a domestic midden, and it was suggested instead that the cumulative deposits resulted from periodic sacrificial feasting over a protracted period of time (*ibid.* 150). What caused the middle pre-Roman Iron Age burial to be the focus of attention centuries after its creation is unclear, but we may recall that the occupants of Romano-British villas in Lincolnshire and Yorkshire apparently also revived use of the iconic Iron Age round-house long after its demise as a regular domestic building type (Harding 2009: 158–69), whilst in southern England hillforts such as Maiden Castle were sought out for the construction of Romano-Celtic temples in the late Roman period. These suggest that traditional rituals and customs had not been eradicated by ‘Romanization’, and that there may even have been periodic revivals of older traditional ceremonials or festivals.

More recently an unusual pit burial comprising four equids—three horses and a mule—was uncovered in close proximity to what was believed to be a ritual enclosure at Nosterfield Quarry near Thornborough near a probable square-ditched barrow (Dickson and Hopkinson, 2011). The animals were buried in pairs, one pair above the other, though the upper pair had been damaged by ploughing. There were no associated artefacts, but the fact that this was a deliberate and carefully arranged deposit is indicated by the fact that they appeared to have been placed back to back and head to toe. All were mature animals in their prime, though they apparently all suffered from pathological conditions that may have caused lameness. Radiocarbon sampling from the femur of one animal suggested a date at the end of the first

millennium BC or beginning of the first AD, so that, if the square-ditched barrow was a contemporary association, it would have been a late survival.

## ANIMAL BURIALS AND RITUAL SITES

If animal burials in pits are to be explained as propitiatory or sacrificial offerings, we might expect that they would occur in association with structures that have been interpreted as shrines or religious foci. At Caesar's Camp, Heathrow (Grimes and Close-Brooks 1993), there is no record of animal deposits, and very little in terms of material remains that would sustain an other than domestic function for the settlement, apart from the unique plan of the 'temple' itself. At Cadbury Castle, Alcock's (1972) assumption that the animal burials in pits in proximity to the rectilinear building N5 were part of a ritual complex was subsequently undermined by the demonstration that the burials pre-dated the building by at least a century (Downes 1997), though the possibility that the location had served as a focus for propitiatory offerings before the construction of the shrine still commands conviction. Between thirty and forty cattle were represented in the burials, some disturbed but mostly discrete deposits, which straddled a former track across the central plateau of the fort, embedded in a layer of rubbish. Apart from two adult beasts in pits, most were neonatal calves, none of which showed any trace of skinning or butchery. Whether or not these resulted from natural deaths or sacrifices, the selection of a single species could still be regarded as constituting special deposition (*ibid.* 150). They certainly stood apart from the remainder of the faunal assemblage, which was disarticulated and fragmented, and showed traces of gnawing, entirely consistent with domestic refuse (Hamilton-Dyer and Maltby, 2000: 291). Among other hillfort sites, we have noted the existence of several structured deposits among the pits underlying the late Roman temple on site B at Maiden Castle (Wheeler 1943: 90–1).

Of non-hillfort sites that have reasonably been interpreted as sanctuaries or temple sites of the pre-Roman Iron Age, Hayling Island in Hampshire (King and Soffe, 2001) is one of the most convincing, not least because the Romano-British temple that was built on top of it so plainly mirrored its earlier outline. Animal bones were certainly part of the votive deposits claimed from the pre-Roman site, together with warrior equipment, vehicle fittings, horse harness, currency bars, and coins, both British and Gaulish and Roman Republican. Among the animal remains there was clear evidence of selectivity, in terms both of species—sheep constituted 59 per cent of the assemblage and pig 41 per cent, with cattle virtually nil—and of parts chosen for deposition, in the case of sheep the upper limb bones and mandibles being dominant and for pig the mandibles and maxilla, followed by upper limb bones. This element of selectivity was a factor that King (2005: 362) also noted in the context of



sacrifice and ritual consumption at Romano-British temple sites. All the votive offerings at Hayling Island were found concentrated in the south-east corner of the enclosure, not seemingly in pits, so that the nature of the deposits remains unclear pending full publication.

Another site in which continuity of ritual functions seems indisputable is Springhead in Kent (Andrews, 2008), where excavations in the course of development of the Channel Tunnel Rail Link on the site of the small Romano-British town of *Vagniacis* exposed evidence of extensive pre-Roman activity, focused around the springs at the head of the Ebbsfleet river. A ditch, 200 metres long and 1.5 metres deep and hardly of defensive proportions, defined the sacred area. Up the slope to the north twin ditches flanked a processional way for 450 metres. The entrance to the sacred area was through the enclosing ditch on its eastern side, immediately inside which was a ritual shaft dating from the early Roman phase of the site's use, in which had been deposited a cow at the bottom, with a further collection of twenty-three dogs, several with their chain leads, some near-complete pots, a human skull, and more animal skulls. The nature of the Iron Age site remains speculative, but it is evident that animal burials formed a continuing feature of ritual into the Romano-British phase.

Even more remarkable is the ritual enclosure at Hallaton, Leicestershire (Fig. 9.3; Score, 2011), dating to the period around the Roman conquest.

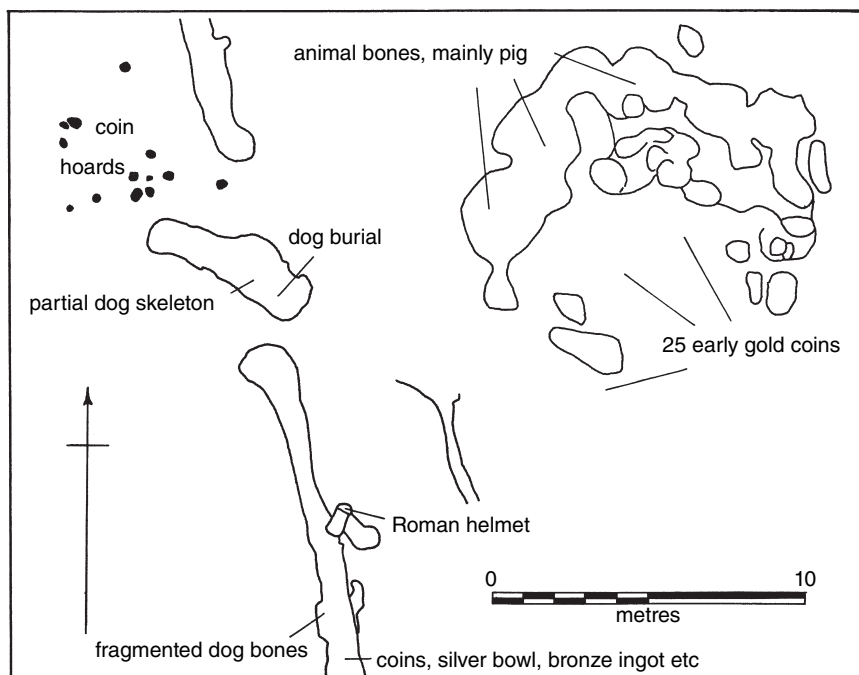


Fig. 9.3 Hallaton, Leicestershire, east entrance plan. Drawing adapted from Score, 2011.

Though the palisade trench has only been exposed around the eastern sector, it seems probable that it extended around the hilltop, probably with several entrances. The east entrance was divided into two narrow passages by a short length of trenching that showed two successive construction episodes, both of which included the burial of a dog. Probably contemporary with the secondary dog burial was a series of metal objects, including silver and bronze ingots and a small silver bowl, together with silver and gold coins, deposited in the ditch some 10 metres south of the east entrance. Arranged in an arc a few metres outside the east entrance, a group of pits contained the remains of at least eighty pigs, almost exclusively juveniles, among which most parts of the skeleton were represented, though there was a notable shortage of right forelimbs. The northern cluster of pits was partly overlain by a spread of fragmented animal bone, again mainly young pigs, which could have been disturbed by ploughing from the pits themselves, but which partly enclosed an area that was devoid of pits, as if there had formerly been a structural feature here, all trace of which had disappeared. Among the bone spread was a fragment of a copper alloy tankard handle, decorated in the La Tène style, which might be consistent with the interpretation of this material as the residue of feasting. Radiocarbon dating of the pig bones indicated an immediately pre-conquest horizon for this phase of activity. In the decade following the conquest, a series of coin hoards was deposited in the northern half of the entrance passage. Fourteen discrete groups were identified, giving a total of more than 2,000 coins, a combination of local inscribed Iron Age and Roman Republican and early Imperial types. Another cache was deposited in a pit, C76, cut into the side of the palisade trench south of the entrance, which contained the bowl of a Roman military helmet and more than a thousand coins. A further pit, C95, cut into the enclosure trench, also contained animal bones, predominantly of young pigs, but cattle, sheep, and dog were also represented.

A remarkable factor about the Hallaton assemblage in the present context, apart from the wealth of associated coins and metalwork, is the almost total dominance of young pigs. Among these remains, the frequent absence of the right forelimb, specifically the radius, ulna, and carpals, must surely reflect ritual preference (Browning, 2011: 132–3), though the fact that the forehock is not the choicest cut might argue against any presumption of a champion's or priest's portion. It remains unclear whether the evidence from Hallaton points to feasting or sacrifice as the principal activity, or a combination of both. Browning (*ibid.* 135) argued that the predominance of young pig could satisfy van der Veen's (2007) criteria for heterarchical or hierarchical feasting, that is, feasting characterized by consumption of quantity or of consumption of selected, choice portions respectively, being evidently not a major component of everyday diet in Iron Age settlements, yet relatively easily bred to meet demand. Despite carefully controlled survey and excavation, the extent of the enclosed area and any possible central focus remain unknown. On present evidence, however, that focus does

not appear to have had substantial structural remains and Hallaton therefore appears to have been essentially an open-air site of communal ritual activity.

Watery sites too show ample evidence of ritual activity involving animals. The ritual platform itself at Godwin Ridge in the Cambridgeshire Fens (Evans, 2013) was made up of four dismembered horses and articulated and disarticulated remains of dog, cow, pig, and a dozen sheep, whilst the assemblage was remarkable for the number of different wild bird species and its pre-Roman evidence for bird sacrifices.

### ANIMAL DEPOSITS IN ATLANTIC SCOTLAND

Among the notable ritual deposits in Atlantic Scotland are the animal burials in pits from the wheelhouse at Sollas in North Uist (Fig. 9.4; Campbell, 1991). Sollas, first detected in the machair by Erskine Beveridge (1911: 121–9), was one of the largest known Hebridean wheelhouses, with an internal diameter of 11 metres requiring no less than thirteen radial piers. Within its interior, both in the peripheral cells and in the central area, were some 150 pits, divided into

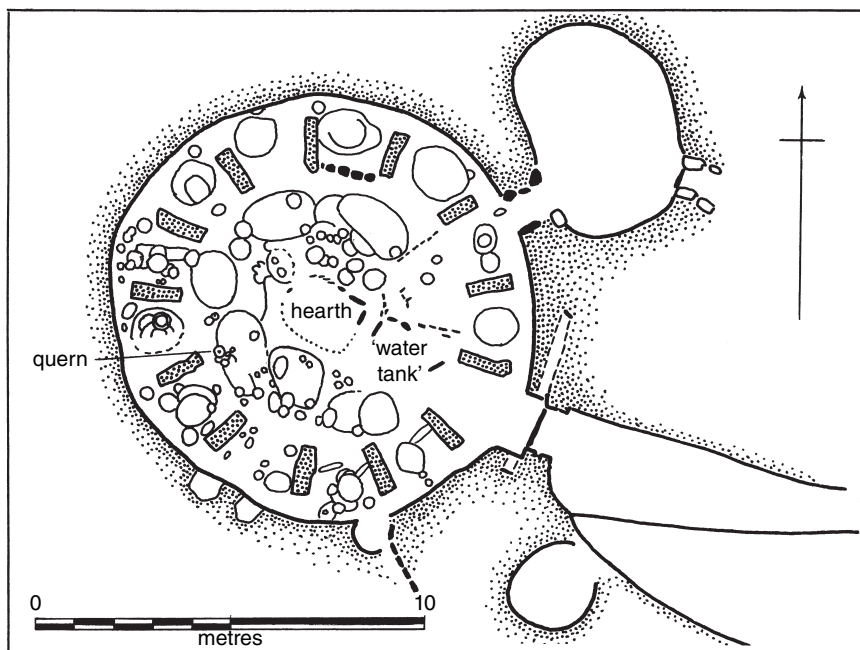


Fig. 9.4 Sollas, North Uist, wheelhouse plan. Drawing adapted from Campbell, 1991.

around twenty large and the remainder much smaller variants, some cells being occupied by a single large pit, others having multiple smaller ones, with a similar combination of the two in the central area. The key factor was that no pits underlay the walls of the radial piers, so that none demonstrably pre-dated the construction of the wheelhouse. The centre of the building, as is common with wheelhouses, was occupied by a kerbed hearth, and, apart from the contents of the pits, the assemblage recovered from the wheelhouse is broadly compatible with domestic assemblages from other comparable sites. Radio-carbon dates indicated that the site was in use around the first or second century AD, in the middle of the 'long' Atlantic Iron Age.

Only around fifty pits contained bone, some burnt, others unburnt and articulated, the compact deposition of the latter in smaller pits suggesting that the remains had been defleshed. In three cases complete sheep had been buried in a larger pit. A high proportion of the articulated remains were of sheep, with a minority of cattle and a single piglet. Around a third of the animals were neonatal, a higher proportion than would normally be represented in a domestic assemblage, and though pottery was not normally part of the accompanying material, the presence of one whole pot containing cremated cattle remains confirms the special nature of the deposits. In terms of distribution, the greatest number of special deposits was in cell 9, diametrically opposite the entrance to the wheelhouse, with fewer in the south-eastern quadrant, flanking the entrance. The pit burials apparently represented a relatively short episode, after which the use of the building was seen as essentially domestic. Yet the number of animals represented is plainly more compatible with communal resources than the stock of a single family unit, and the absence of pit burials on this scale in any other excavated wheelhouse still argues for its special role in communal ritual. Despite the striking character of the assemblage, there remains the puzzle as to why only a third of the 150 pits contained animal deposits. The presence of a quernstone over one pit prompted the suggestion that libations had been poured through it into the pit, which raises the possibility that other rituals may have been performed within the wheelhouse that need not have left archaeological traces.

There are other instances where animal remains have been found in what appear to be foundation deposits, like the complete head and beak of a great auk, buried with a small, complete pottery vessel behind the wall of wheelhouse 2 at Cnip (Armit, 2006: 198). Animals' teeth may have had a talismanic attraction, occasioning the cache of cattle teeth against the foundations of pier 6 at À Cheardach Mhor on South Uist (Young and Richardson, 1960: 141) and that from one of the peripheral cells at À Cheardach Bheag (Fairhurst, 1971) or the hoard of seals' teeth from Beirgh in west Lewis (Harding and Gilmour, 2000: 23). A particular focus for votive or talismanic deposits is the central hearth. Around the hearth at À Cheardach Bheag was an arc of red deer jawbones, while the hearth of the secondary occupation at Dun Bharabhat,

Cnip, had a double line of sheep teeth embedded in the floor around it (Harding and Dixon, 2000: 17). These are all surely domestic, household dedications in contrast to the scale of the Sollas deposits. Likewise, ceremonial sites with metalworking associations of the Northern Isles, like Mine Howe, are clearly special, and it is hardly surprising that the dog skull in the chamber by the landing of the subterranean flight of stairs at Mine Howe should have prompted comparison with mythical guardians of the underworld (Harrison, 2005: 6).

## ANIMAL SYMBOLISM IN ART AND ARTEFACTS

It is widely recognized that animal imagery in Iron Age art tends to focus on noble beasts, notably boars, bulls, stags, and horses, or those that have a sinister aspect like snakes or ravens. These, we might infer, were held in awe by Iron Age people, and were perhaps invested with supernatural or divine attributes. In the La Tène art style animals and birds are never represented in complex designs naturalistically any more than is the human image. They occur only as fantastic mythical creatures in schematic form, as in the dragon-pairs that embellish the mouths of scabbards from eastern Europe to the Pyrenees, including examples from the Thames (Stead, 1984), while a variant form of confronting beasts is found on belt-clasps north and south of the Alps, in a backward-looking pose that has conventionally been regarded as showing orientaling influences. These emblematic designs might easily have been talismanic and, whatever their cultural derivation, could have been absorbed into local custom or superstition. The other major contribution of animal motifs in Iron Age art is as fragmented elements, abstracted and reconstituted, as in the birds' head terminals and wing-like elements in the *repoussé* designs on the Torrs pony-cap or the Wandsworth circular shield (Harding, 2007: figs 7.1, 7.4). These too may nevertheless have had a residual apotropaic or talismanic quality. Animals do occur in representational form, however, as three-dimensional models, like the boar images from Hounslow, Middlesex, or from Rhossili, Glamorgan, though, as Jope (2000: 105–7) argued, by comparison with continental examples like the Neuvy-en-Sullias, Loiret, bull, the insular models are more docile porcines. Some of these figures will have been free-standing, others may conceivably have adorned helmets, on analogy with the extraordinary helmet from Ciumești in Romania (Harding, 2007: fig. 6.5) on which a bird of prey has hinged wings to permit them to flap.

Three-dimensional animals and birds were popular in later European prehistory before the La Tène period. Bulls are known in bronze from the Hallstatt Iron Age, and stylized stags and horses with riders are depicted in a hunting scene on the cult vehicle from Strettweg in Austria. Bird models and bird protomes are associated with cult model vehicles from the Urnfield Late

Bronze Age and water birds are depicted in *repoussé* on beaten bronze vessels that must have been for ceremonial or festive occasions. The associations of birds and animals in some of these instances are clearly with ceremonial activities involving feasting and drinking, with a special set of equipment and probably involving a religious dimension. In Britain and Ireland sheet-bronze buckets and cauldrons doubtless served similar festive and ritual purposes, though bird symbolism is not an overt element in the Atlantic Late Bronze Age.

In the later pre-Roman Iron Age in Britain and continental Europe animals and birds are represented prominently on coinage, both naturalistically and fantastically. The horse is a predominant element, but principally on the reverse as part of the chariot team, initially adopted from classical models but progressively deconstructed and adapted to suit local styles. Horses with human heads, winged horses, gryphons, and sphinxes are all part of the exotic pantheon, sometimes, as among the Veneti, depicted in the most bizarre scenarios. One coin of Tasciovanus depicts such a figure playing musical pipes in the fashion of a centaur. How far the classical mythology had been adopted or absorbed into local traditions, and how far these symbols were purely formulaic renderings of misunderstood models, is hard to tell. One curious quirk of coin art is the depiction of a bird of prey or raven riding on the back of a horse, a symbolic motif widely distributed from Britain to central Europe that must surely reflect barbarian rather than corrupted classical mythology. One of the most frequently depicted beasts on coinage in Britain and Gaul is the boar, which may appear both as a stylized representation of the animal by itself or in company with a horse. Perhaps more importantly in the present context is its representation as a boar standard on a pole or truncated pole, indicating that it was used as a processional symbol or battle standard. This would certainly be consistent with the impression of a stylized boar on the original face of the Witham shield (Harding, 2007: fig. 7.3), though whether these were symbols of personal or group identity or of divinities whose potency and protection the bearer wished to invoke is unclear. From their use in such imagery, and from their occurrence in funerary or ritual contexts, it is clear that the pig had a greater symbolic significance than is reflected in its relative importance in the agricultural economy. Sheep hardly feature in the repertory of symbolic imagery, in contrast to their role in the economy of many regions, though rams or rams' heads very occasionally figure on brooches or bracelets of the La Tène period in Europe. We should not overlook the fact, however, that most of the examples of La Tène art are from high-status metalwork, and probably therefore representative only of a narrow section of society. They may not reflect vernacular art of a more ephemeral kind, such as the designs or symbols that might have been painted on the walls of houses, or that might have been woven into clothing, or indeed painted on the bodies of individuals on festive or ceremonial occasions.

Finally, though dating from the later Iron Age in northern Britain, the Class I sculpted stones attributed to 'Picts', the distribution of which concentrates mainly in eastern and northern Scotland, include images of 'noble' animals and birds, bull, boar, wolf, eagle, together with fish and snake, that almost certainly had ritual and talismanic qualities in the context of symbol stone art, examples of which are known in close proximity to cemetery sites of the period. These are beyond the scope of the present study, but are evidence of the enduring veneration of animals and birds in later Iron Age communities.

## CONCLUSION

The burial of whole or partial animals in a variety of archaeological contexts is a widespread feature of the insular Iron Age, and not simply restricted to the southern and eastern zone where disused storage pits afforded a common location for secondary deposition. Distinguishing special deposits from domestic rubbish, disposal of rotten carcasses, or the by-products of butchery can be problematical, but a number of factors may argue in favour of special deposition:

- the presence of associated artefacts
- the context of discovery, such as within a foundation deposit of a building
- the incidence of species disproportionate to their occurrence in the domestic assemblage
- selectivity in the occurrence of certain limbs or parts of animals
- manipulation of the remains into spatially choreographed arrangements, and
- the use of composite skeletal groups

Recognition of special deposits, however, is just the first step towards their interpretation. The diversity of deposits in scale as well as context and associations suggests a variety of possible purposes, among which we should distinguish those associated with human burials, whether as meat offerings, residues of funeral feasting, or as attendant burials, from those that constituted separate propitiatory offerings or sacrifices, and from those that were the residues of communal feasts from other festive or religious occasions. If the distinctions are archaeologically difficult to make, this may be because they were not rigidly drawn in the perception of Iron Age communities.

## Conclusions

### Death and burial in the Iron Age

Most studies of Iron Age burial practices in Britain begin by recognizing that, with a few notable but limited exceptions, there is no recurrent and regular form of disposal of the dead for most of the first millennium BC. We have questioned whether this is a reasonable expectation, that there *should* be a regular funerary rite, or whether this is simply conditioned by contemporary religious or secular standards. More specifically, our expectation of a regular funerary rite involving the intact inhumation of the dead or the deposit or disposal of the cremated remains as an entity may not conform to regular Iron Age practice, in which it seems that fragmentation and dispersal may have been common. Is there any reason why a diversity of practices, more difficult to recognize archaeologically, should not have been deployed in prehistory, already perhaps long before the Iron Age when the absence of recurrent and regular cemeteries happens to register archaeologically as a conspicuous omission? The fact that in certain regions at certain times one particular mode of disposal predominates, or happens to leave conspicuous archaeological traces, may lead archaeologists to expect a measure of standardization of practice that does not represent the actual diversity of prevailing rites. The real issue, therefore, is not to explain the absence of a conspicuous or recurrent rite, but the basis of choice that made communities adopt various practices, burying some individuals or groups in graves or cemeteries, others in re-used grain storage pits, and disposing of the disarticulated remains of others in various locations around a settlement.

#### SEGREGATED VS INTEGRATED

A second question, however, is when *did* the disposal of the dead in Britain first take the form of cemeteries, the recurrent and regular form of which



might encourage us to believe that the majority of the population was disposed of in this way? It would be easy to respond by saying that there are formal cemeteries in Neolithic long barrows and chambered tombs, but sacred landscapes like the Boyne valley in County Meath or the Kilmartin valley in Argyll suggest that these special tombs may have been for much more than disposal of the dead. The Early and Middle Bronze Age is the period when funerary monuments dominate the landscape much more than evidence of settlement, until the later Bronze Age, when landscape enclosure and hillforts come into prominence with a corresponding decline in evidence of religious and funerary monuments. The first millennium BC presents us with the apparent paradox of a wealth of settlement remains with sparse and unevenly distributed evidence for burial, after which Romano-British cemeteries might satisfy our expectation of a normal, regular, and recurrent form of burial. Still later, beyond the northern Roman frontier, burial practice is variable and selective (Winlow, 2011), though the widespread adoption of extended inhumation in the later Iron Age is broadly coincident with the introduction of Christianity. Is regularization of disposal of the dead, therefore, one of the by-products of state-level social organization or of the dominance of a religious convention?

Of the latest pre-Roman Iron Age cemeteries, King Harry Lane and Westhampnett are the largest yet known in terms of numbers of graves in Britain, and within the size range of the larger cemeteries of the period in continental Europe. At Westhampnett, apart from a low representation of neonates or infants, the cemetery appeared to conform broadly to expectations of a 'normal' population. King Harry Lane likewise appears to have been a regular cemetery, used over several generations into the Roman period by the inhabitants of the nearby 'poly-focal' settlement at Verulamium. Apart from these, the majority of known late pre-Roman Iron Age burials and cemeteries were too small to have served the population at large, and some from their structure and associations were plainly highly selective.

Among earlier Iron Age cemeteries only those of eastern Yorkshire attain the size or recurrence that might account for a majority or at least a sizeable proportion of the population. Certainly the largest, Wetwang Slack with 446 graves, could have sustained a village of 50–60 individuals for 250–300 years, assuming a stable mortality rate. But though air-photographic survey has indicated the incidence of cemeteries at intervals of around a kilometre, few are likely to prove to have been on the scale of Wetwang Slack. Their demographic capacity is plainly dependent on the number of graves and the length of time that the cemetery was in use, leading to a potential Catch-22 dilemma. If we opt for the traditional long chronology, the number of graves per generation may not be sufficient to account for the entire population. If we adopt the new, shorter chronology, then there would be, but only by leaving the earlier and later centuries represented in settlement devoid of burials,

requiring an alternative explanation. On balance, the Yorkshire series appears to be the best contender in the British Iron Age for a regular and recurrent burial rite, in which role it would certainly derive support from the presence in continental Europe of similar cemeteries of the early and middle La Tène, likewise regionally concentrated.

The crucial question therefore must still be why were formal cemeteries adopted in these limited circumstances, and what was the more general but elusive standard practice elsewhere? We have argued that normal practice may have involved a variety of different rites, but that an essential difference lies between *segregating* the dead from the living in a dedicated cemetery or *integrating* the dead into the living community by one of several different means. The key surely lies in that most fundamental of archaeological ironies that, for periods in which religious and funerary monuments predominate, evidence of settlement is relatively sparse, while in periods such as the Iron Age, when hillforts and settlements fill the landscape, the opposite pertains. Instead of being a perverse demonstration of Murphy's Law intended to vex the archaeologist, we should surely see a significant causal relationship. With the enclosure of the landscape from the later Bronze Age and the building of monumental community sites in hillforts, the population became more identified with its everyday settlements than with special sacred places in the landscape that were marked by funerary or religious monuments, so that integrating the dead within the hillfort/settlement complex, whether within domestic enclosures or in the dependent fields, became the dominant convention, from which the use of burial grounds was an occasional or regional departure, notably in regions where fewer hillforts were built. This then remained the insular practice until renewed contact with continental 'urban' fashion in the late pre-Roman Iron Age brought about progressive and varying degrees of change to more formal cemeteries, notably in the south-east of England where hillforts were never densely concentrated, and where most had been abandoned as major centres by the end of the second century BC. In effect, what we have always regarded as the exception, burials in pits and ditches around the settlement and fragmentary remains in a variety of contexts, was the norm, and our expectation of formal burial in cemeteries, though regionally represented and even typical over a limited period of time, is truly the exception.

There still remains a further possibility, of course, resulting in neither segregated nor integrated outcome, and leaving no archaeological trace. The apparent veneration of natural phenomena, alluded to by classical sources, together with bird and animal symbolism in art and iconography, suggests that one perception of the afterlife may have been that the spirit of the dead was released from all earth-bound constraints, to be liberated and re-incorporated into the universal order. In these circumstances it may be that a rite such as cremation and scattering of the ashes, far from being just an archaeologist's cop-out, was the most symbiotic form of disposal. Such a rite, though obviously

undemonstrable archaeologically, could still have been a common means of disposal of the dead in prehistory. Even though there would then be no physical remains of or memorial to the dead, it is conceivable that certain sacred places in the landscape were notionally dedicated to their use, which might account for the odd absence of tangible evidence of activity at prominent sites adjacent to occupied hillforts, as in the Eildon Hills in Roxburghshire or Yr Eifl range in Caernarvonshire (Harding, 2012: 273), which might have been dedicated to the spirits of ancestors.

However diverse the practices involved, our basic definition of a burial still requires the presence of human remains, whether complete, partial, or fragmentary. The possibility has nevertheless been raised that other deposits, notably hoards in the late pre-Roman Iron Age, may have been linked in some way to burials, effectively being surrogate grave-goods, whether as capital assets for the deceased in the otherworld, as dedications to placate the forces of the otherworld, or as a demonstration of conspicuous consumption on the part of the kin group. For the earlier Iron Age in Britain, terrestrial hoards are limited in number, though it is more difficult to assess the extent and frequency of analogous deposits in rivers, lakes, or the sea. Yet the number of 'special deposits' that have been claimed from settlement sites of the earlier Iron Age, though generally regarded as 'ritual', have seldom been adequately explained. Whilst it is unlikely that any single explanation will satisfy all circumstances, deposits linked to funerary rituals or commemorative activities on anniversaries, for example, seem one possible reason for special deposits.

### CHRONOLOGY, GEOGRAPHY, AND RELATIONSHIPS TO CONTINENTAL EUROPE

A striking aspect of the formal cemeteries in Iron Age Britain is their limited geographical distribution *and* their short chronological span. The cremation cemeteries of south-eastern England are restricted to the late pre-Roman Iron Age, and the Durotrigan cemeteries of south Dorset are likewise a late development, though both significantly survive the Roman conquest by a couple of generations. What prompted the emergence of a visible finale to the funerary process after centuries of less formal disposal? Even the barrow cemeteries of eastern Yorkshire, if the latest radiocarbon assessments are a reliable indicator, covered a much shorter span than previously supposed, so that their appearance and disappearance coincides with no other apparent episode of archaeological significance.

Geographically Britain invites a dual approach from continental Europe. Easiest of access to influences from west-central Europe is the shortest channel crossing to Kent and the Thames estuary, from which seaborne traffic might

extend up the east coast. In the later pre-Roman Iron Age it is this zone of influence that resulted in close similarities in funerary practice between the cremation cemeteries and richly furnished burials of south-eastern England and those of north-eastern France and Belgium. Further west Atlantic trade routes had evidently been exploited from the Neolithic, with progressive extension through the Irish Sea and beyond. This latter route is intermittently attested in the later Bronze Age and early Iron Age, but is most obviously manifest in Mediterranean and Gaulish connections in the post-Roman later Iron Age. These two axes of interaction served to influence and fashion the cultural identities of Britain in prehistory. An older generation of archaeologists would have characterized the Atlantic axis as more conservative than the south-eastern cross-channel axis, but only because of a presumption of uni-directional innovation originating from the Continent and ultimately from the Mediterranean and Near East. A more subtle view might now see the central European and Atlantic sequences in European prehistory as complementary and interacting variously at different periods in prehistory.

In terms of funerary practice, it is surely significant that in Britain the two principal traditions of burial in cemeteries that bear closest comparison with continental fashions, the Yorkshire series of the middle pre-Roman Iron Age and the Aylesford–Welwyn cremation cemeteries of the late pre-Roman Iron Age, both lie within the eastern and south-eastern zone. It is surely also significant that in Britain these are the regions where hillforts are least dense in their distribution, suggesting the possibility of an inverse correlation between the distribution of hillforts and cemeteries. For much of the Atlantic zone, on the other hand, the evidence for burial in the Iron Age is more ephemeral, and we must assume that the practice of fragmentation and dispersal was one reason for the failure of a regular burial tradition to register in the archaeological record. These need not have been exclusive traditions, though the evidence from Yarnton certainly suggested that fragmentation and dispersal was less common where there was an adjacent formal burial ground.

Despite the evidence for seaborne connections with continental Europe from at least the Neolithic via both these routes of access, Britain in the Iron Age displays a marked degree of cultural insularity, lacking the number and variety of the distinctive material types that characterized the central European Urnfield–Hallstatt–La Tène cultural sequence, whilst maintaining established insular traditions such as circular rather than rectangular plans for domestic buildings. In the late pre-Roman Iron Age, the southern coast of Wessex was evidently receptive to traders from continental Europe, most obviously through Hengistbury and Poole harbour, but imports of Dressel *amphorae* have a fairly limited coastal distribution. Sporadic examples further inland, such as ten sherds from twenty years' excavation at Danebury, may create a distorted impression of the extent of penetration inland. Breton styles of pottery are also found in this same coastal zone (Cunliffe, 2005: 474–82), suggesting

maritime contacts around the western approaches that we might have expected to be more in evidence further south-west and along the north Cornish and Devon coasts. The exotic brooches from Harlyn Bay and Stamford Hill certainly hint tantalizingly at south-west European influences, but apart from the coastal distribution of the cemeteries, there is little to suggest that the form of burial itself was the product of any external impulse (Henderson, 2007: 278–9).

The re-appearance of cremation burial in the south-east of England in the first century BC is far from the unitary phenomenon that it once appeared to be. Though some cemeteries and burials, notably Westhampnett and Baldock, are demonstrably earlier in date, the great majority of sites still belong to the post-Caesar horizon, and many belong principally or entirely to the first century AD. It is nevertheless clear, notably from the introduction of coinage, that communities in the south-east were in close contact with their continental neighbours at least from the later second century BC, at a time when the cremation rite was already typical in continental Europe. Caesar claimed that within living memory Diviciacus of the Suessones had ruled in Britain as well as in Gaul (*dBG*, II, 4), and it seems probable that there were treaty agreements between kin groups if not common sovereignty between polities in Gaul and Britain in the late pre-Roman Iron Age. Under such circumstances it is hardly surprising that common funerary practices should have been adopted by those communities of south-eastern England most closely and regularly in contact with their continental neighbours and allies. But how far this also coincided with radical changes in social and political structure is open to debate.

## THE ROLE OF HILLFORTS

One of the most challenging issues in Iron Age archaeology is the re-appraisal of the role of hillforts. For an older generation it was axiomatic that hillforts were built for defence. Then from the 1980s a new generation was beguiled by the siren sounds of those who liked to imagine an Iron Age populated by peaceable farmers living in egalitarian harmony with their neighbours and concerned only in their monumental constructions with expressions of social identity and community endeavour. The massive walls and gateways of the most impressive Iron Age hillforts may indeed have reflected the status and identity of their builders, but to deny that they also were designed as defensive enclosures defies an abundance of archaeological evidence to the contrary. It has been argued that some hillforts are not located to best defensive advantage, which merely reinforces the fact that defence was not necessarily the sole or primary consideration. The key factor in determining the location of a hillfort was what took place within it, which may well have compromised maximum defensive advantage.

So what did take place within hillforts? The older view would have assumed that they were for regular occupation, in effect that they were fortified settlements or walled towns. There can be little doubt that many hillforts were indeed so occupied, like the small hillforts of the Scottish Borders, or larger sites elsewhere such as Garn Boduan in the Llyn peninsula or Hambledon Hill in Dorset. But others may not have been simply defended settlements, but may have served other community roles, such as places of periodic assembly, for markets, festivals, diplomatic exchange between neighbouring groups or more distant allies, legal gatherings or inaugurations, together with ceremonial and ritual occasions, none of which need have required a large resident community. A focus for funerary rituals may have been one important role (Harding, 2012), not least in view of the apparent absence of a recurrent and regular class of cemetery for much of the insular Iron Age in those regions where hillforts are a dominant feature in the landscape. It is now widely accepted that excarnation was practised in the British Iron Age, after which the disarticulated remains could have been disposed of as individual bones or fragmented parts, thereby resulting in the apparently erratic occurrence of human remains on settlement sites. If this was one regular convention for the disposal of the dead, where better could the excarnation platforms or mortuary structures have been located than in hillforts, where they would have been secure from intrusion or vandalism by the profane or hostile, and where the community's collective identity would have been focused?

The idea that four-post settings, widely interpreted since the Little Woodbury excavations (Bersu, 1940) as the foundations of raised granaries, might also have served to support excarnation platforms was proposed some years ago (Ellison and Drewett, 1971) on the basis of ethnographic analogy with native North American practice, where the dead were exposed for protracted periods pending periodic funerary ceremonies. This need not invalidate the idea that four-posters also functioned as granaries, since such a basic structure could have served a variety of purposes, and in normal circumstances there would have been a greater seasonal need for grain storage than funerary structures. In fact, a conceptual link between the agrarian cycle and the human life-cycle is implicit in prehistoric societies, reflected for instance in the use in the European Late Bronze Age of 'house-urns' modelled on raised store-houses (Bradley, 2005: 99–100). If indeed some hillforts were used for funerary purposes, however, ethnographic models suggest that this might well have compromised their simultaneous use as centres of a resident population, or at least required that the area dedicated to excarnation and funerary rituals was segregated from the domestic settlement (Ellison and Drewett, 1971: 192). In the case of a hillfort like Danebury, where the interior is largely given over to pits or four-posters, and where the houses are limited in number, insubstantial in construction, and mainly peripheral in distribution, it might be argued that the houses were only ever intended for limited occupation by a custodial group.

In other instances, such as Hod Hill, the interior is dominated by round-houses that appear primarily to have been for domestic occupation, with very few four-posters or other ancillary structures, so that there is no *a priori* basis for inferring that every hillfort served a role in funerary activities. In fact, by comparison to the fate that befell some other hillforts, this may have been one reason why a subservient population was permitted to continue in occupation at Hod Hill apparently for several decades after the conquest. Clearly not all hillforts served the same function, even within Wessex, much less beyond.

We have identified hillforts as potentially having formal cemeteries immediately beyond their ramparts. Burials within hillforts still pose problems, however, not least because in general they suggest an infrequent or irregular practice, perhaps reflecting temporary inhumation before final disposal. At Castle Hill, Little Wittenham, a sufficient proportion of pits contained burials to suggest a pattern of recurrence, whereas at Danebury the number of pits with burials relative to the total, distributed over the considerable span of the site's use, argues for much more intermittent occurrences. Whatever their significance, however, any notion that pit burials were 'casual', with the wholly unwarranted inference of indifference on the part of Iron Age communities whose motivation we find hard to explain, should finally be discounted. Together with other forms of special deposition, and in keeping with the exposure of the dead through excarnation to disarticulation, fragmentation, and distribution, human burials in hillforts may have been simply part of a broader canvas of ritual activity in which disposal of the dead was not the only or even the primary purpose, but to which it was an integral accessory. It was doubtless these activities that attracted the adverse attention of the Roman army at Ham Hill, Sutton Walls, and elsewhere, the remains of which, being cleared and dumped in hillfort ditches, have been misinterpreted by archaeologists as the product of massacres inflicted on hapless natives by the conquering forces.

## RECONSTRUCTING FUNERARY RITUAL AND BELIEFS

Any attempt at reconstruction of Iron Age funerary practices is necessarily speculative in the absence of unequivocal archaeological evidence for any part of the process other than the final stages of interment or cremation of remains. What is clear, however, is that there was a considerable diversity of practice, dependent presumably on local custom as well as variables in terms of status within a kin group and personal standing, with consequential degrees of complexity in the stages preceding disposal. Conclusions must necessarily be qualified by the possibility that the surviving remains represent only part of the population, and that a significant proportion was disposed of in ways that still elude the archaeological record.

A fundamental facet of surviving Iron Age burials is that the great majority in segregated burial grounds and cemeteries are individual rather than collective in the sense of multiple interments being made in a single ossuary. In some instances there is evidence of fragmentary remains of other individuals, or some additional cremated remains, but it is not always clear whether these were contemporary or successive, nor therefore whether any subsequent burial was fortuitous or meaningfully related to the other. Integrated burial, on the other hand, especially where fragmented remains are concerned, almost by definition subsumes the individual into the collective.

Occasionally two (or very occasionally more) complete burials are found in the same grave disposed in such a way as to suggest simultaneous interment, as for example the woman buried with older female 'attendant' at Viabes Farm, the couple from Wetwang Slack, or the woman and child from Watchfield. In the absence of a chamber that could be re-opened or other archaeological evidence for secondary deposition, the possibility must be considered, either that bodies may have been preserved in some way until such time as two or more could be buried simultaneously, or that the second burial resulted from the ritual death of a relative or dependant in the form of grief suicide or attendant sacrifice. Notwithstanding the fact that Caesar's allusion to the sacrifice of slaves and dependants may have been included as political propaganda, there may have been some basis of truth in relation to high-status funerals, though it seems probable that in more mundane circumstances animal sacrifices served as proxy dedications or that 'special deposits' of material goods satisfied outstanding debts and obligations. Grief suicide, on the other hand, whether of a close member of the deceased's family such as husband or wife, or of a devoted attendant, can hardly be authenticated archaeologically, though it cannot be discounted.

On the other hand, combined burial could have been achieved by temporarily inhuming the first deceased, then exhuming the body for re-interment, or the body could have been exposed for excarnation and re-assembled for burial. Either of these methods, however, might have resulted in anatomically displaced or depleted remains. Alternatively, it is possible that bodies could have been preserved by one of several possible methods about which archaeology is only now becoming aware. Iron Age communities were doubtless aware of the preservative qualities of bog burial, for example, and the example of Knowe of Skea suggests that bodies may have been exposed to salty wind and spray deliberately as a form of mummification. Communities that doubtless cured meat and fish by smoking presumably would equally have had the capacity to preserve bodies under controlled conditions until the appropriate season for a great festival of the dead when final interment could be completed.

This raises the possibility that funerals did not take place *ad hoc*, but at a due time or season, requiring interim preservation of the dead, either in the home or in a special mortuary location, as could have been provided within



the confines of a hillfort. Elsewhere, where hillforts did not afford a focal repository, mortuary houses may have been constructed in or near the burial ground. The larger square-ditched enclosure attached to the three Wetwang chariot burials may have been for this purpose, being abnormally large for a burial enclosure itself. The funeral ceremonies might then take place when auguries were auspicious and the community had duly assembled and celebrated according to custom. The concluding act in formal interment would be the erection of a visible marker, as a memorial or simply to prevent intrusion by subsequent burials. Relatively few burials in the British Iron Age, however, appeared to be marked by substantial mounds, and even those that might be regarded as focal or signal burials are more often distinguished by their contents than by their surface appearance.

Most inhumations from formal cemeteries appear to have been of intact bodies, either dressed or wrapped within a shroud. It is possible that these bodies had been laid out for a period of time prior to burial, but the anatomical layout of the skeletal remains for the most part appears to indicate that the body was intact at the time of deposition. In some instances the posture may be unnatural, with head awry and limbs twisted or even occasionally with bones missing, but there is little to suggest that the skeleton had been defleshed and disarticulated and re-assembled for final burial, a process that, even supposing a detailed knowledge of anatomy, would surely have resulted in some contrived configurations. The example of composite skeletons in the Late Bronze Age burials at Cladh Hallan, therefore, remains exceptional at present, though we have seen several instances in which animal burials have been reconstituted or arranged as composite skeletons, so that explicitly looking for such anomalies should be an objective of future field research. There are certainly instances in human burials where particular bones appear to be missing, which should not invariably be attributed to extraneous damage or inept excavation, and which may reflect deliberate acts of relic retrieval at the time of burial or subsequently. The same motivation could account for subsequent Iron Age intrusion, which need not always therefore have been hostile.

For a society for whom the 'cult of the head' appears to have had special significance, it is noteworthy that very few Iron Age inhumations have been beheaded, compared, for example, with the number known from Romano-British cemeteries. Separated skulls are found, however, as at Harlyn Bay, and innumerable examples of skull fragments from settlement contexts, so that there is ample evidence for the importance of skulls, but in formal burials evidence of decapitation is rare.

The alternative to inhumation of the body complete in a grave appears to have been defleshing, disarticulation, and distribution. Far from being abnormal, casual, or a practice reserved for social outcasts, this now appears to have been the practice whereby the majority of the population was disposed. Defleshing could be achieved by one of three methods, by exposure to

excarnation, by temporary interment until decomposition had taken place, or by physically stripping the corpse of flesh. There is some evidence for the last of these options where the bones show traces of knife marks, as most recently reported from Ham Hill, though presumably in the hands of a skilled operator defleshing could be achieved without inflicting damage to the bones. Why defleshing should have been undertaken, rather than adopting the other two 'natural' processes, is obviously likely to prove a contentious issue, since it raises the prospect that some form of funerary cannibalism was practised. One possible reason could be that defleshing accelerated the natural process in circumstances in which those responsible for the funerary rites could not depend upon a longer time-scale. In the case of Ham Hill, there is evidence that the hillfort was stormed by the Roman army around AD 45 in the form of ballista bolts and fragments of Roman cavalry harness (*The Times*, 6 Sept. 2013); though it is not suggested that legionaries were responsible for the defleshing of their victims, political uncertainty may have necessitated an accelerated schedule among the local community. As in the case of the alleged massacres at Sutton Walls, Bredon Hill, and Cadbury Castle, it seems much more likely that the hillforts were the focus of native funerary practices which outraged the sensitivities of the Roman invaders and prompted their destruction and desecration.

Interim burial in principle should leave no positive archaeological evidence, since the intention will have been to exhume the remains after a due period of time, which ethnographic analogy indicates could be from a few months to several years, for final burial, marking the end of the deceased person's transition to the company of ancestors. If pit burials in hillforts and settlements represent interim interments, then plainly these were bodies that were never recovered for final disposal, which may have resulted from locally changing circumstances if indeed the interim phase was protracted over several years. On the other hand, pit burials that were not special dedications may simply have been an alternative form of final burial, sometimes re-using pits dug for other purposes and sometimes resulting in small groups of pit burials that approximate more closely to our perception of a formal burial ground. Probably the more effective means of achieving decomposition was excarnation, either on open platforms or within protected mortuary houses, the archaeological evidence for which likewise may be structurally indistinguishable from post settings commonly interpreted as foundations for grain stores.

After defleshing, decomposition, or excarnation, the skeletal remains could have been interred as a re-assembled skeleton or fragmented and distributed as individual bones in liminal locations around settlements, such as ditches or entrance structures. These happen to be contexts that are commonly subject to archaeological investigation, but there are others, around associated fields, boundaries, or trackways, for example, where the chances of discovery by excavation are minimal.

With the adoption of cremation, as we have seen, there is increasing archaeological evidence for structures related to the funerary ritual in addition to the grave itself, namely pyre sites and mortuary enclosures in which the dead may have been laid out for a protracted period of mourning prior to cremation. A key discovery from a number of cremation burials of the late pre-Roman Iron Age in south-eastern England is that only a relatively small proportion of the cremated remains was deposited in the grave, a feature that can hardly be attributed to casual indifference. Once again a positive wish to distribute the remains over more than one location would seem to be a more likely solution, leading to the further possibility that a significant proportion, if not the majority, of the cremated population was disposed of by scattering of ashes without any being deposited in a formal grave. As with inhumation burials, few cremations were marked by substantial mounds, though the paucity of instances of graves cutting earlier burials argues for some surface marker.

The absence of objects of intrinsic value or notable artistic merit from the lavishly furnished graves of the late pre-Roman Iron Age in south-eastern England raises issues regarding the status of grave-goods. Most of the equipment included in these graves is essentially domestic furnishings—dinner service, drinking and serving accessories, firedogs, gaming equipment—or professional items of equipment, like the warrior's, doctor's, or scribe's at Stanway—with relatively little that might regarded as genuinely personal. The absence of torcs and coins especially may be significant, since these are more commonly found in hoards. There may be various reasons for depositing valuables in hoards, but if it was the practice to dedicate such material as part of the funerary process, it could be that such deposits were made in particular sacred places rather than in the grave or on the pyre.

In all of these putative funerary scenarios there are several key moments at which elaborate funerary events, such as communal feasting, could have taken place. The period of time involved is likely to have been in some measure proportional to the status of the deceased, in that for major events it is likely to have taken some time to inform and to assemble all those related and dependent communities that would have been entitled or expected to participate. Apart from the funerary process itself, the assembly of kin and dependants would presumably also have been the occasion of determining issues of inheritance and resolving any disputes that might arise relating to obligations or entitlements.

## THE BASIS OF SELECTIVITY

We have seen several instances in which excavators of Iron Age burials remark that the surviving remains do not reflect the local demographic profile, so that

burial must have been on a selective basis. If, as we have argued, there were various different conventions for the disposal of the dead, the choice of any one of which may have been open to the individual, his or her kin and dependants, or the community at large to decide, then it might not be surprising if those conventions reflected variations on the living demographic profile. But the question remains, what determined the mode of disposal, and why should there be significant regional variations in the balance of options? The option of formal burial in a dedicated barrow cemetery was evidently only widely favoured in eastern Yorkshire, and even here the proportion of the total population represented, or the basis for choice or selection, is not self-evident, since there is continuing uncertainty over the period of time represented by the barrow cemeteries, and hence the proportion of the likely population represented. The most obvious exclusion from the square-ditched barrow cemeteries is of infants and children, who generally are not buried within the central grave, unless accompanying an adult. Infants and children, however, are buried in the ditches of square barrow enclosures, suggesting that there was a line of demarcation between admissible and inadmissible ground. If the pit burials in Area 10 at Garton Slack genuinely represented a separate children's cemetery then it would be further testimony to the fact that sub-adults were generally disqualified from burial in the square-ditched cemeteries. The suggestion that has been widely canvassed, that children below a certain age or threshold of adulthood were excluded from full membership of society, and hence from burial in a formal cemetery, would certainly be compatible with Caesar's report (*DBG*, VI, 18) that the Gauls deemed it improper for a son to appear in public with his father until he had attained adulthood, defined as the capability of bearing arms.

If this applied to the Yorkshire cemeteries, however, it was evidently not a universal convention in southern England, as is testified by the Suddern Farm cemetery, where nearly half of the interments were of children or infants. The same was true of the south-west cemetery at Mill Hill, Deal, where children's graves are interspaced among those of adults. At Yarnton there was one sub-teenage child in each of the northern and southern cemeteries (Hey et al., 2011: table 16.2), with infants and neonates among the 'outliers' (integrated inliers in our current re-assessment) within the settlement area. In fact, it is clear from the number of infants represented at Gussage All Saints, Gravelly Guy, and elsewhere that they could be buried in settlements, and that it was not the rites of burial that were denied to children, only certain areas within dedicated cemeteries.

In the late pre-Roman Iron Age cremation cemeteries there is no evidence for the exclusion of children. At King Harry Lane there were two dozen cremations of neonates, infants, or children from successive periods scattered across the cemetery. Whilst the problems of identifying age from cremated remains may render this an unreliable statistic in terms of percentage of

population represented, it is sufficient to show that no obvious exclusions were in operation. Similarly, the Westhampnett assemblage included infants, though it was suggested that infant and neonatal fragments might be more vulnerable to loss through circumstances of deposition and survival (McKinley, 1997: 64).

Gender plainly was not normally a basis for admission to or exclusion from burial in formal cemeteries. Though there are some suggestions of spatial grouping of female graves, they are hardly sufficient to regard as evidence of systematic gender segregation. And whilst the proportions of male to female graves, and indeed the age profile, may on occasions not conform to 'normal' expectations, there is little tangible evidence that these were significant factors in the composition of cemeteries.

### CURATION AND RITUAL DEPOSITS

There can be little doubt that human remains were used for ritual purposes in a variety of contexts, some of which may have involved human sacrifice, resulting in macabre remains like those in the Sculptor's Cave. But this need not mean that all deposits of human remains that served ritual purposes involved sacrifice of the living. Plainly the fragmentation and distribution of the remains of the dead satisfied a ritual purpose, and it is not self-evident that the act of distribution invariably followed completion of the excarnation process. We have seen a number of instances, from Great Barford to the Howe and Dun Vulcan, where radiocarbon dating suggests that the skeletal remains were curated before final deposition. In the case of the skulls deposited around the perimeter at the Wasserburg it was suggested that curated human remains were used to appease whatever malign forces were believed to have caused rising water levels to threaten the settlement, and it is possible that in the British Iron Age too the physical remains of the revered dead were curated against future need to avert or repel disasters or conversely to induce prosperity and success. The femur and half skull in the infilled ditch adjacent to the east entrance at Pimperne were plainly from context placed deposits of significant body parts that may well have been curated remains that were subsequently dedicated to appease some unknown threat or disaster.

If indeed human remains were curated, perhaps simply as a focus for veneration rather than intentionally banked against potential crises, a question arises where such remains were kept. Those that were regarded as communal may have been kept within the security of a hillfort or other central place, though archaeologically there is little evidence for collective curation from hillfort interiors, as opposed to the display of supposed trophies of severed heads, as at Bredon Hill, within the gateway area. But it is equally possible that the remains of respected family members could have been curated in a

mortuary house within the settlement or even within the family house itself. Structures founded in paired pits just inside and clockwise of the entrances to round-houses at Pimperne and Longbridge Deverill (Hawkes and Hawkes, 2012), too substantial surely simply to have been settings for looms or tables, as has sometimes been suggested, could have been for domestic shrines, where such items could have been displayed. Perforated skulls, like those from Hunsbury hillfort or Hillhead broch, elaborated with head-dress, could have been central to such shrines, communal or domestic. Whether whole skeletons or only major parts would have been curated and venerated in this way can only be speculated, and the Crosskirk skeleton would appear to be exceptional.

We have seen instances in which graves have apparently been robbed, or from which bones may have been removed. It is increasingly apparent that not all such instances can be attributed to vandalism in antiquity. Instead, access to the dead and the removal or curation of tokens of the revered dead appears to have been fundamentally embedded in funerary ritual (Sørensen and Rebay, 2007).

## GRAVES, GRAVE-GOODS, AND STATUS

The popular platitude that death is a great leveller is plainly a truism only in the most basic physical sense, as any Victorian or Edwardian civic cemetery in Britain will amply demonstrate. The scale or elaboration of tombs, or in the associated assemblages found within graves in antiquity, may indicate the status of the deceased or of their families within the local or wider community. Funerary rites and the treatment of the dead nevertheless may be as much a reflection of community need as a measure of regard for the dead. Group identity may have been more important than individuality, and reinforcing or reasserting group integrity may have been one purpose of the funerary ritual.

In the case of the British Iron Age, however, relatively few graves of the earlier Iron Age are distinctive in either respect, which is not to say that the funerary rituals were not elaborate, or that lavish gifts were not bestowed on behalf of the deceased in ways that did not impact on the final interment. Even in the late pre-Roman Iron Age in south-eastern Britain, where we tend to think of the Welwyn series of graves as more elaborate because of the inclusion in their chambers of a range of domestic goods, the artefacts in question are essentially related to hearth and home, rather than reflecting an individual's personal status or wealth. Plainly the presence of *amphorae* or a drinking or dining service reflects the status of the dead to the extent that they were from a social group that could command these resources, but their presence in the tomb presumably reflects essentially prevailing funerary conventions and spiritual beliefs of the community rather than personal attributes of the dead.

In the Yorkshire square-ditched barrow cemeteries, size of barrow enclosure does not appear to have been a significant index of status. Barrow sizes varied markedly, with the extant trio at Scarborough for example standing out from the lesser mounds around them. But none really attains monumental proportions, and size is not obviously related to status. Half of the larger barrow enclosures at the Makeshift cemetery did not have surviving central graves, and of those that did the contents were hardly qualitatively distinct from lesser barrows. Stable isotope analysis (Jay and Richards, 2006) indicated no significant distinctions of diet in the various grave types within the Wetwang Slack cemetery, nor any significant variations over time, so that any hierarchy in the social order was not evident from a more lavish dietary lifestyle.

The inclusion of a chariot on the other hand should surely be significant in terms of social hierarchy, though it is still unclear whether the chariot represented the vehicle of a mobile warrior or whether it was a purely ceremonial carriage for the funeral. In continental Europe wheeled vehicles, first four-wheeled wagons in the late Hallstatt period, then two-wheeled carts or chariots in early-middle La Tène, together with cult wagons from the Urnfield Late Bronze Age (Harding, 2007: 20–4), had an important role in ritual activities, including funerary rituals and feasting, whatever may have been their role as everyday transport. It is also clear that in the Yorkshire series chariot burial was not gender exclusive, three of the known chariot burials being of women, and in the Wetwang Slack trio the female burial is central in a symmetrical layout with common north–south orientation of the graves that suggests that the warriors may even have been in an attendant relationship.

Apart from chariot burials, the most obvious case for inferring a hierarchical social structure in the Iron Age relates to that group that are referred to in the classical sources as *equites*, the warrior aristocracy generally, rather than specialist cavalry, chariot warriors, or elite infantry. Kristiansen argued that ‘aristocratic warfare and retinues were a more or less continuous feature of European history from the beginning of the second millennium BC until the rise of medieval states in temperate Europe’ (1999: 176). Though ritual, rank, and warfare may well have been embedded in Iron Age society, the archaeological evidence from earlier British Iron Age burials is hardly overwhelming. The presence of sword, spear, and shield in a grave may well indicate a warrior, or an individual who was nominally entitled to warrior status, but we may suspect that some individuals with just a sword or a spear might have been no more than a head of household, for whom a token weapon symbolized his or her role as provider and protector of the family and immediate dependants, doubtless also bearing responsibility for raising fighting men if required by their superior. Classical sources suggest that there may have been bands of warriors like the *Gaesatae* described by Polybius, sometimes compared to the *fianna* of later Irish legend, whilst some groups were reputedly especially skilled as slingers, but there was no tradition of standing armies or garrisons

in Iron Age Britain or Europe. Accordingly, weaponry in graves either may have reflected personal martial skills and accomplishments of the deceased or were associated with the office or rank in the community held by that individual.

In Britain the evidence for an Iron Age warrior aristocracy is not overwhelming, with the total of known La Tène swords and scabbards being fewer than 300, which may be compared to Vouga's (1923: 31) inventory estimate of 166 from the site of La Tène itself, or to more than 2,000 broken weapons from the sanctuary site at Gournay-sur-Aronde. A high proportion of the British examples came from watery contexts, notably from the Thames, with occasional finds in hoards and a few from hillforts. Instances of burials with weapons are relatively rare outside eastern Yorkshire, where they occur mainly in 'signal' burials or in the limited series of extended inhumations of Stead's Type B. From the Aylesford-Welwyn group of late pre-Roman Iron Age cremations, as we have seen, swords are generally absent. The occurrence of swords in burials in Iron Age Britain is therefore limited, with more than twice as many having been recovered from rivers (Stead, 2006: tables 8–10), discounting the Hallstatt Gündlingen series and derivatives, which would further enhance the contrast.

In a limited number of cases, we may legitimately infer from associated grave-goods the special status of the deceased. The surgical instruments in the doctor's grave at Stanway most likely do indicate the role of the deceased in life, with the intriguing association of rods that may have been used for divination. This combination of roles is matched at Whitcombe, where the grave-goods suggested the deceased may have been a warrior and a smith, the latter again an art that traditionally has magical associations. Certainly there is every reason from documentary sources to suppose that technical skills or knowledge of the supernatural arts would have conveyed some special status upon their exponents (Gillies, 1981). Likewise, the inclusion of an inkwell in the 'scribe's' grave at Stanway and the counters and stylus in one of the graves at Litton Cheney suggests that pragmatic literacy may have commanded a premium of respect within the later pre-Roman Iron Age communities of southern Britain. In almost all societies, learning is a key to inclusion in the ranks of the select, those in the know being privileged over those who are not. Plainly preserving the exclusiveness of knowledge was the purpose of the druids' aversion to written documents, and the arcane and often recurrent motifs of La Tène art almost certainly conveyed meaning beyond simple decoration to those who understood their significance (Hunter, 2013). The fact that these more elaborate designs are found almost exclusively on gold or bronze artefacts that would have been symbols of power and wealth, rather than on more mundane materials such as wood, bone, or domestic pottery, might suggest that the meaning was understood only by a limited elite within society.



In terms of social status, the most striking instance as indicated by grave-goods is the warrior grave 112 from Mill Hill, Deal, where the decorated bronze crown must surely indicate an individual of exalted social rank, and though physically detached by some 50 metres from the central and south-western cemeteries that continued in use thereafter, from the second century BC into the Roman period, it may well have been the inaugural burial for those inhumation cemeteries.

## HIERARCHY AND INHERITANCE

It is generally accepted that Iron Age society in Gaul in the first century BC or thereabouts, as described by classical sources, was hierarchical, but it has become fashionable in recent years to argue that this was a late development, together with other political and economic changes such as the introduction of coinage and elements of market economy, concomitant with increasing social complexity. Caesar's account of Gaulish social structure, doubtless basically sound, was nevertheless surely an oversimplification of an extremely complex system, involving for example, more subtle grades of dependency than he was aware of or acknowledged. Given this probability, it seems unlikely that such a system should have developed in a relatively short space of time. More probably it was the product of conventions governing ownership and inheritance of property and a system of reciprocal obligations that had arisen over many generations. Far from being a recent innovation, the system described by Caesar by the first century BC may have been on the verge of collapse.

Status in Iron Age society in Britain was almost certainly based primarily on land ownership, or on stock holdings in areas where a pastoral economy was predominant. Haselgrove (2004: 15) recognized a social and economic division in the Low Countries between the northern limit of the distribution of coinage and the southern extent of the north European byre-house tradition, suggesting a distinction in social and economic values that might equally apply to Britain south and north of the Trent. Economic wealth represented by access to and control of resources, and the capacity for their redistribution, would have been the likely hallmark of an individual or kin group at the upper end of the social scale, and status within the hierarchy would therefore have depended upon the degree of dependency upon others or conversely on the number of clients or other dependants over whom control was exercised. Archaeologically, numerous dependants might well result in a large assemblage of grave-goods, if funerary convention required some acknowledgement of debt to be included in the tomb, but there could have been a variety of other ways in which obligations to a social superior who died might have been

discharged. Hierarchy does not have to be based on material wealth. As late as the 1980s the author witnessed the shocked response of a strict Presbyterian crofting community in the Western Isles to a case of public disorder which resulted in a police response on the Sabbath. The Clerk to the (Common) Grazings Committee, a role that equated with village Head Man in an area where land was owned by virtually anonymous consortia, and in those days still commonly a respected veteran of the 51st Highland Division or the Arctic convoys, was incensed by this violation of the code of hospitality, adding with evident outrage, 'and he isn't even a crofter!' The point of this remark was that the offender, though a middle-aged man and self-supporting through working as a merchant seaman, did not have his own crofting rights, which were still in the name of his elderly mother. Accordingly, he had no status in the community, and was sent packing. Archaeologically, this local hierarchy would have been undetectable, since houses in the townships were almost identical in design and furnishing, with every outward sign of an egalitarian society. Whilst Karl (2008) is doubtless right therefore to recognize that the simplistic pyramid structure that was once used to characterize 'Celtic' society belied its complexity and fluidity, and that there may have been different degrees of hierarchy from one region to another over time, a key problem of interpretation for the archaeologist is that tangible material remains, as may or may not have been deposited in graves, were not the only or even prime means of expression of that social hierarchy, which must more commonly have been the control of land and livestock.

It is not easy to infer social customs from archaeological evidence, while documentary sources, and retro-inference from much later documentary sources especially, must plainly be treated with caution. It seems probable, nevertheless, that property could be inherited by both male and female beneficiaries, as Prasutagus' daughters were intended to do. As regards holding high office, it seems clear from the examples of Boudicca and Cartimandua that women could achieve paramount or royal rank. In this case, the Vix or Reinheim 'princesses', or the lady buried in the central Wetwang Slack chariot burial, may well be the archaeological manifestation of such rank, though other explanations remain possible. Though dynastic kings like Cunobelinus may have attempted to legitimize or reinforce their authority by claiming paternal descent on their coins, it is clear that succession was not by primogeniture of the male line. Kings or leaders were evidently chosen from a shortlist of those that were eligible, and it seems likely that eligibility could be claimed by both male and female contenders through bilateral descent lines, which would account for the option clause in the event of dispute alluded to in respect of the 'Picts'.

Older conventional models of the 'Celtic' hierarchy were undoubtedly simplistic and misleading, and it is hardly surprising that they have now been widely discredited. But there are subtler signals of social differentiation

that may elude archaeological detection, and the notion of Iron Age society as egalitarian and lacking any form of social discrimination is surely equally misguided.

## THE ROLE OF 'FOCAL' AND 'SIGNAL' BURIALS

In the discussion of focal and signal burials neither term was intended to be synonymous with 'high status', though the burials in question might well have been of individuals who were from an elite in the social hierarchy. In the case of signal burials it is important to distinguish whether it is the individual primarily who is marked out as special, as is clearly the case with grave 112 at Mill Hill, Deal, or whether it is the grave that is elaborately furnished, as, for example, in most of the conspicuous graves of the Welwyn series, where most of the cremated individuals are wholly anonymous. It is important to focus on what the grave assemblage is actually signalling on behalf of whom, and in some cases it would appear that the signal is being transmitted by the community at large rather than on behalf of the individual deceased. 'Focal' is perhaps less contentious, in that, though it invariably involves a grave that is notable, either for its greater size or structural elaboration, or for the number or quality of its grave-goods, the key factor must be its relationship to other, subsequent burials, the spatial arrangement of which imply some dependency upon the primary burial. The implication is that the focal burial is in some sense ancestral to the group, or was of someone with whose memory or protective aura subsequent burials might be associated. Essentially, its primary role was as a grave memorial, whereas signal burials can evidently have served other roles in which burial might almost seem incidental.

Conspicuous among signal burials of the British Iron Age are the chariot burials of eastern Yorkshire and beyond, not least because they belong to a wider tradition of vehicle burial that links them to the central and west-central European cultural sequence. Despite the obvious role of chariots in warfare, as described by Caesar (*DBG*, IV, 33), it is by no means clear that chariots in the Yorkshire graves denoted warrior status. Weapons are not typically included, and apart from the vehicle fittings and horse harness, there are few personal grave-goods. Of those that have notable associations, chariot burial no. 2 (WS 454) from Wetwang Slack, with iron mirror and bronze sealed cylindrical can of uncertain purpose, was the grave of a mature woman. These distinctive objects, together with the fact that the two 'attendant' chariot burials unusually were equipped with swords, suggest that the person buried in the central grave may have exercised authority, perhaps involving divination and spiritual powers (Giles, 2012: 156). Of the five iron mirrors known from eastern Yorkshire, three are from chariot burials, including the very similar example

from Wetwang Village. The implication, therefore, is that chariot burial was not a signal of warrior status, unless in an entirely honorific capacity, though unquestionably selective and prestigious.

Among the later mirror burials, of course, the Bryher cist-grave is unique in Britain in having a mirror in association with both sword and shield, a combination that would generally be accepted as indicating a warrior. By contrast, the presence of toilet equipment in the Portesham mirror grave, and in the nearby burial overlooking the Chesil beach, together with essentially domestic, if high-class, associations at Birdlip and elsewhere, may imply a cosmetic role for mirrors, but this could still have been in the context of special ritual or ceremonial occasions. Perhaps the most persuasive case for their supra-functional significance, however, is the enigmatic symbolism embodied in the engraved designs on the back of the mirror-plate, and the fact that they are not part of the high-status domestic assemblage of the continental late La Tène.

The Welwyn series of burials, conventionally regarded as high-status graves, in practice as we have noted signal very little about the individual whose cremated remains they contain, since most of the material comprises food and drink or the service that is associated with feasting, together with symbols of hearth and home like firedogs or gaming-board and pieces. Particularly significant is the absence of weaponry from the Welwyn series. The individuality of the deceased, of course, may have been evident on the pyre, from which little or nothing will survive in the grave. The one exceptional item of a personal nature, the spiral snake bracelet of northern British type from Snailwell, is sufficiently exotic in this context to suggest that it was a special treasure of the deceased. If that hints at the possibility of a high-ranking female burial, then the apparent presence of a shield would be an interesting combination. In general, however, personal effects are absent from Welwyn-type graves, which is not invariably the case with other late La Tène cremation burials.

Of particular interest is the fact that some of the most lavishly equipped graves from south-eastern England are not pre-Roman, but of the period of the conquest or even shortly thereafter. In some instances it might appear that the local dynasties were asserting their identity in the face of an alien presence with extravagant consumption of material wealth in their burials, even though some of those goods derived from trade with the Romanized world. In other instances, however, notably in the case of the Lexden tumulus, the inclusion of Roman artefacts more probably signals the local hierarchy's pro-Roman allegiance, which in some cases doubtless dated from the period of Caesar's raids of the mid-first century BC. Depending upon the scale and elaboration of the memorial, the kin group or wider community might either celebrate the achievements and repute of the deceased or make a statement to others of their own identity and authority through the establishment of that monument. In

doing so they might invoke the ancestral dead to legitimize their own entitlement by association with older funerary monuments, or conversely a new regime might deliberately vandalize the burials of those whom they have usurped to underline the demise of the old order. The scale of the monument or the quality and quantity of grave-goods may therefore be a measure not so much of the status or achievements of the dead as an assertion of the status of those who created the tombs and lavished wealth upon them. This might particularly have been relevant in times of social and political upheaval, such as the period of the Roman conquest, which saw the creation of signal burials of the Welwyn-Lexden series in south-eastern England and isolated examples elsewhere that may have been designed to assert the identity, even if no longer effectively the authority, of a particular dynasty in the face of the Roman threat.

### FRAGMENTATION AND 'DIVIDUALITY'

Modern archaeology has been much concerned with identity and 'personhood' (Fowler, 2004), whether personhood and individuality are effectively the same, or whether the concept of individuality is anachronous in the Iron Age. One important aspect of personhood was its relationship with the animal world. The modern western world tends to see humanity at the apex of a hierarchy, having the capacity for rational thought and a sense of moral responsibility that are thought to be lacking in lesser orders of animal. But it is not clear that Iron Age society shared that conviction, and from emblems in metalwork and on coinage we might infer that certain wild beasts and birds of prey were treated with a measure of veneration, or were regarded as having a special interrelationship with human beings or the dead. The concept of duality of personhood between human and animal might account for instances in which skeletons of animals are found in the same or adjacent contexts to human burials, though this would not appear to have applied to formal cemeteries in the British Iron Age.

We have seen abundant evidence for fragmentation and distribution of human remains in hillforts and other settlements, especially in what have been termed 'liminal locations', such as enclosure ditches or entrances, the disarticulated bones resulting from excarnation of a single body presumably being distributed in more than one location. Alternatively, these 'dividualized identities' (Fowler, 2001: 145) could have been curated domestically or communally, so that they continued to exert some potent social influence after death. Though the analogy of saints' relics from the Middle Ages may be anachronistic, there is every reason to suppose that Iron Age communities revered the memory of ancestors and those among the more recent dead whose achievements, prowess, or wisdom had earned the respect and regard of their dependants. The same

concept of dividualized identity may be implicit in the small proportion of cremated remains found in many late pre-Roman Iron Age cemeteries. In both cases the principle could be the same, that the remains of the benign dead should be distributed in and around the settlement of the living to the continuing benefit of kin and the community.

One possible use for such dedicated remains would be in the context of foundation deposits or closure episodes, in the phrase of Armit and Ginn (2007: 125) 'liminal moments rather than liminal places where propitiatory offerings were deemed appropriate'. The idea of foundation deposits marking major episodes of construction, of a house or a hillfort rampart, for example, is hardly novel. But such deposits need not have been limited to inaugural occasions. Instead, if buildings and structures were seen as having a life-cycle parallel to that of their occupants, then offerings may have been appropriate at various stages, the re-thatching of a house, renovation of a hillfort's rampart or re-hanging of its gates, and including closure ceremonies when a building was abandoned or dismantled. The inclusion of human remains might have been especially significant if the deceased individual had some special affiliation with the site or building involved.

There remains, however, a conceptual contrast between segregated and integrated burials. The funerary record from cemeteries and burial grounds in the British Iron Age comprises essentially the burial of individuals, not collectively or compositely, nor generally as fragmented parts, but apparently as discrete individuals. The documentary record of late pre-Roman Iron Age Britain and Gaul is certainly populated by larger-than-life individuals, and the emergence of dynastic leaders of a hierarchical society in the late pre-Roman Iron Age is hardly credible as a sudden and late development. Yet the fact that burial is individual rather than collective does not mean that the afterlife was seen as a simple mirror image of human existence. Caesar attributed to the Gauls a belief in transmigration of the soul, an issue that was not just of incidental interest to him, since it accounted for their valour in battle. Assuming some such belief in a spiritual afterlife, the mortal remains, whole or fragmented, would have been potent tokens of those venerated individuals. The fragmentation and dispersal of human remains and the close integration of human burials with the burial of whole or partial animal remains suggests a belief that the dead were translated into another existence and perhaps ultimately subsumed into a larger cosmic order, and the location of these remains in spatially or chronologically liminal contexts suggests that they were regarded as continuing to fulfil a fundamental role in the daily routine of the living.

If this was indeed the regular mode of disposal of a great majority of the dead in the first millennium BC in Britain, it is hard to accept that this was entirely novel as a consequence of social, political, economic, or environmental changes in the later Bronze Age. We are bound to ask therefore whether archaeologists have been beguiled by the apparent emphasis upon sacred

landscapes and conspicuous classes of funerary monuments from the Neolithic and earlier Bronze Age into accepting that these represent the normal form of disposal of the dead, rather than exceptional or perhaps 'signal' categories that disguise the presence of an older tradition of fragmentation and dispersal. Hitherto the relative paucity of settlement evidence may have hindered the investigation of such practices.

## CHANGE AND CONTINUITY

It has been argued that the British Iron Age was characterized by a diversity of practice in the disposal of the dead, not just between segregated and integrated disposal, but in the variety of practice within each. Equally it has been argued that hygienic disposal of the dead was not necessarily the sole, nor even the primary reason for interment in a grave—as opposed to other means of disposal—which most obviously creates a physical focus that might serve as a statement on the part of those responsible. The apparent contrast between those regions and periods in which a regular and recurrent form of burial in cemeteries is archaeologically recognizable and those for which the evidence is limited or virtually non-existent is underscored by our expectation of the former and our failure to appreciate why Iron Age communities might not universally have conformed to this norm. The answer must lie in part in a community's attitude towards death and the afterlife, whether they believed that the dead inhabited a totally separate otherworld or whether they regarded the world of the living and the world of the dead as parallel, and the dead therefore as still part of the community. If indeed they believed the latter, then disposing of the physical remains of the dead in various forms around settlements and their environs would be entirely consistent with an expectation that the dead still had a role to play in the life of the community. Reviewing the evidence for the late Iron Age in northern France, Delattre (2011: 609) concluded that there were 'no barriers between the worlds of the living and the dead or between the sacred and the profane'. Classical sources suggest that Iron Age communities believed in transmigration of the spirit, but whether into human or animal form, or indeed into inanimate objects or features in the landscape, remains unclear. Such beliefs would certainly not be incompatible with a tradition of fragmentation and dispersal. Though cultural insularity in the British Iron Age may have discouraged the adoption of regular cemeteries as a majority practice and led to a greater diversity of regional traditions until the later pre-Roman period, it seems likely that a similar range of practices prevailed in continental Europe, where not all local traditions are as regular and recurrent as those of the Champagne or middle Rhine.

By the end of the first millennium BC it is clear that there were fundamental changes taking place in the fabric of Iron Age society in Britain. These were characterized from the end of the second century in the south-east by the appearance of coinage and a greater measure of craft specialization, sometimes seen as indicators of a market economy, new forms of centralized, proto-urban settlement, and the emergence of more complex social entities dominated by a hierarchy of historically recorded dynasties. How radical these changes were from the preceding social structure remains a matter of debate, but there can be little doubt that they were coincident with if not the catalyst for the appearance of cremation cemeteries and individual or grouped burials that are more distinctive in their layout and accompaniments than most of the limited number of formal burials known from the preceding millennium. Burial conventions may be regarded as the consequence rather than the initiator of social change, but religious beliefs that determined funerary practice must also have had an impact on the social order, not least because the secular and religious elite were undoubtedly closely related. Social or political change notwithstanding, the importance of place in funerary ritual is evident, not just from the fact that burials in the Iron Age respect older funerary monuments in the landscape, but from the fact that Iron Age burial sites themselves were widely re-used in the post-Roman period as Anglo-Saxon or Anglian burial grounds. It evidently did not require cultural continuity to preserve a sense of sanctity of place.

Our knowledge of Iron Age burial practices in Britain remains deficient. How might that deficiency be addressed by future research? Finds from developer-funded excavation will doubtless continue to enhance the database, sometimes no doubt spectacularly. But the fact that we have scarcely a single example of a Welwyn-type grave that has not been seriously damaged is a measure of our dependency upon chance discovery in development rather than targeted research excavation. This is even more crucial when key questions, such as whether the remains have been deposited selectively or with key elements missing, or disposed in a particular pattern, perhaps involving re-assembly of excarnated or disarticulated remains, or the construction of composite skeletons, require meticulous excavation and recording. The areas immediately beyond hillfort and settlement enclosures could certainly be targeted by geophysical survey in the hope of locating more formal cemeteries, whilst the importance of landscape or enclosure boundaries as repositories of fragmented and scattered skeletal remains argues in favour of greater attention being paid in future to the stripping of hillfort and enclosure ditches, particularly stretches flanking their entrances, in anticipation of structured deposits, both human and animal.

We began by highlighting the 'elusive dead' as a long recognized phenomenon of the British Iron Age. Closer examination has shown that rites of disposal of the dead in prehistory included a variety of practices that may leave



limited archaeological trace and the evidence for which has too often been dismissed as unrepresentative of normal funerary practice. Formal cemeteries may have been favoured intermittently throughout prehistory, but their ready recognition archaeologically has undoubtedly obscured a greater complexity of funerary conventions, and in some instances, where conspicuous monuments may have served other ritual purposes in which burial was simply one element, may actually have led to a misreading of the archaeological evidence. In the infancy of any discipline there is a danger that the interpretative picture will be painted in poster colours with cartoon clarity; on greater maturity, the image will show subtler gradations of tone and shades, not necessarily so clear, but perhaps closer to actuality.

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